

Yoga and Pregnancy

Dr Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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Dr Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

from the Bihar Yoga Teachings



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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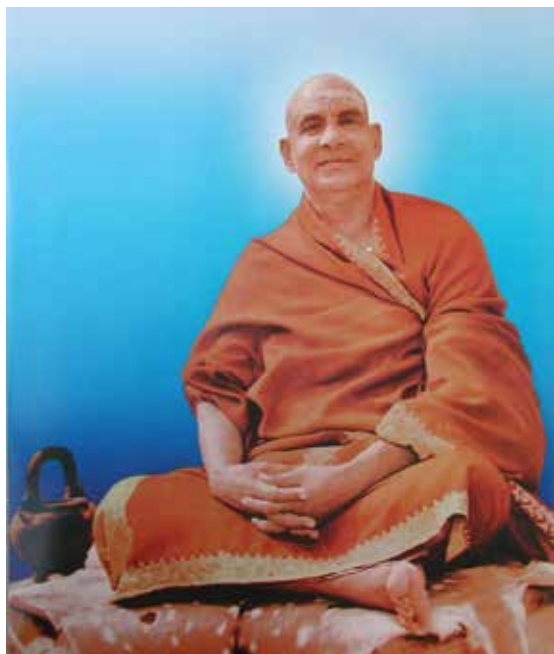
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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As a man I am indebted to my mother. When I talk like this I represent all men. We are indebted to our mothers. I am indebted to my mother who gave me the secrets of success in life, who guided me and put me on the right path and from whom I imbibed all the good samskaras that percolate through the pores of my body and the whole of my being.

It was also she who let me go to leave home in search of God. You may write off any other debt in this world except the debt to your mother. Mother is the life giver, the giver of knowledge and samskaras. She shapes the destiny of her child. Just as the future of a tree is embedded in the seed, the destiny of a child is imprinted in the womb of the mother.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*
3 December 1997, Rikhiapeth, India

DEDICATION

To the universal divine creative force
whom we know across many cultures and traditions as:

Mother Earth
Gaia
Shakti
Devi
Divine Mother

May she guide and protect us as we travel
the timeless path of motherhood,
bestowing on the fruit of our womb her blessings
of wisdom, compassion, courage, faith and inner peace.

Introduction

Since time immemorial humankind was awed by the mystery of day and night, the seasons, the regularity of the low and high tide, the secret of birth, life and death. Looking at the infinite space of the night sky, the countless stars and the ever-changing moon, wonder and reverence filled their hearts. With the birth of human consciousness, questions were born and the search for answers which continues until today.

Yoga is one answer to these questions. In the vastness of yoga vidya, the science of yoga, answers can be found and experienced.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The aim of this book is to engage its readers in the reflection and connection between the vast cycle of creation at the universal level, and the cycle of the individual human life.

Yoga and Pregnancy is therefore not a self-help book for expectant mothers. The aim is to place the nine-month period in the greater experience of human life and live it in the most beneficial manner with the attitudes, disciplines and practices of yoga as developed by the Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga tradition.

Understanding human life as part of a universal, cosmic experience, acknowledging the wisdom of the ancient seers

and sages, and reconnecting to the power and beauty of Shakti can enhance the time of pregnancy for the woman and her family.

Around the world, yoga classes for pregnant women have become popular. They prepare the expectant mother for the event of giving birth and the arrival of her child. However, most of these classes consist of *yogasana* and methods of breathing that can be applied so that discomforts during pregnancy and the various stages of birth can be managed more easily.

Yoga vidya is a holistic approach to yoga and life. The six branches of the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga, hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga can be introduced into everyone's daily life. This integral system of yoga along with the yama of happiness and the niyama of japa, as well as disciplines and attitudes of a yoga lifestyle, cater to all the needs, aspirations and dimensions of human existence. The physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions are embraced in an appropriate and uplifting way. Applied with awareness, wisdom and common sense, yoga is an ideal system for the welfare of mother, the growing child and the family.

A chapter on adolescence and the need to guide the young people has been included. With the onset of puberty, the teenager is physically in a position to procreate, to create new life. Curiosity and the urge to explore sexuality is natural, yet if not guided and managed in a suitable way it can lead to imbalance and suppression. The rise in teenage pregnancy shows that the physical maturity is not matched by mental and emotional maturity. Parents can support their children to understand and cope with the many changes in body and mind, and bring the family closer together. An understanding of yoga as a way of life can help prepare the adolescent physically and mentally and allow them to explore their spiritual dimension.

New life begins before conception with the cultivation of positive qualities in the parents. The character building of

a child continues then in the mother's womb. Therefore, it is somewhat in the parents' hands to shape the progeny, the future generation, they wish to have. This requires effort from the prospective parents. They may not be able to achieve everything but they should try to the best of their capacity, and the outcome will be that much sweeter. The character of parents and the atmosphere of the home environment exert great influence on the new life.

Most expectant mothers are interested in managing the common discomforts associated with pregnancy. Each pregnancy, each mother and each family environment is unique, and this book is helpful if it is adapted to the circumstances, aspirations and requirements of all.

As one progresses in yoga, one develops a greater awareness and understanding of the depths of one's own being at each of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. One reconnects to intuitive wisdom, and the process of pregnancy and childbirth becomes a wonderful journey of discovery for both parents and the unborn baby.

Yoga and Pregnancy is an expression of good wishes for the journey of motherhood and the journey of life. May yoga begin well before and continue well after the birth of the child to shape the future generations of humankind.

Part 1

In Search of
Understanding

1

Creation

Begin each day as if it is the beginning of a new life.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

According to modern science, time and space are two separate dimensions of energy. When they travel from opposite directions and unite at one point, matter is created and the object becomes manifest. Everything is created in this way. Time, space and matter are the three dimensions of this universe. The sun, moon, mountains and oceans, everything is composed of time, space and matter.

Positive ion and negative ion have to come together to create a molecule. Together a positive and a negative pole of the magnet generate a magnetic current. Twenty-three chromosomes from the father and twenty-three from the mother create a new human being. A thought or a mental image and an action done by the hands create a new object. In short, when two complementary forces come together, only then something new is created. Creation is always the result of a union of positive and negative forms of energy. At the cosmic level union takes place between time and space, at the atomic level between positive and negative ions, at the level of living beings between male and female, and at the individual level between mind and prana, ida and pingala.

The result is creation of galaxies, a molecule, a new living being, a spiritual transformation, a new level of consciousness. Creating something requires imagination and planning as well as skill and action. Positive creation is always accompanied by joy and a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

In tantra creation is seen from a different angle: as the evolution from the inanimate, lifeless form to the conscious form.

Tantra does not view creation as the emergence of planets, galaxies and stars in the physical sense only. Creation is viewed as the creation of sentient life, and an insentient life form is a stepping stone to sentient experience. For example, first earth was created as an insentient form, and then it became the container and the home for sentient beings. In this manner, creation is not the emergence of an object, but the emergence of life, for it is life that experiences creation. According to the permutation and combination of the elements of creation, different levels of 'sentientness' emerge, from a single-cell amoeba to animals to the human form. Evolution of sentientness until it becomes universal is, in fact, the aim of tantra.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

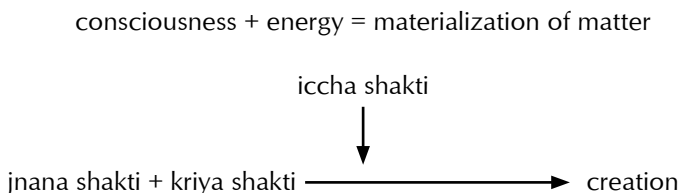
The mystery of creation has found expression in countless myths, ideas and theories since the dawn of humankind until the present age. Each civilization tried to find an explanation for the origin of the universe, of life and human life. Around the world the various mythologies have taken the role of describing and clarifying what puzzled human understanding. At one end of the spectrum we have the Genesis, the poetic version of the Old Testament where an Almighty God created everything in just six days. At the other end, we witness modern science which is still in the process of giving answers, grappling with infinity of space and eternity of time.

Samkhya – theory of creation

Among all the systems and models of creation Samkhya, attributed to Sage Kapila, is the most relevant to yoga. The Samkhya system of philosophy, from which the yoga shastra originate, has a similar but more extensive view of creation. To put it simply, Samkhya states that there are two components that exist eternally: pure consciousness, Shiva, Purusha or cosmic consciousness, the seeing, the knowing principle; and primal energy, Shakti, Prakriti or cosmic prana, the doing, the acting principle in its dormant stage.

The Upanishads describe Shiva and Shakti as a pair of one lame person and one blind person. Consciousness is like a lame person; it knows and understands everything but is unable to undertake any action. Energy is like a blind person; it does not see anything but is active. When guided by consciousness it can accomplish everything. Individually they are not capable of achieving anything but when united they complement each other.

When consciousness activates the dormant energy creation begins. When *jnana shakti*, the power of knowledge, activates *kriya shakti*, the power of action, creation begins. But when does this activation take place? When there is *iccha shakti*, the power of desire, or *vasana*, the inherent seed of desire.



A portion of the cosmic consciousness is enclosed in, or associated with, the newly forming matter in the form of the *atman* or soul. The energy with its inbuilt three qualities or *gunas* of sattwa, rajas and tamas undergoes a series of changes resulting first in subtle matter which subsequently develops

into progressively more gross matter. The process is known as 'evolution' and the different matters produced are known as evolutes.

The first evolute is *mahat* or wisdom, the knowing and discriminating faculty. The next evolute is *ahamkara* or the 'I' principle, self-identification; then comes *chitta* or the memory bank that stores previous learning or impressions. Then comes intelligence, or *buddhi*. The next level of evolutes are *manas* or the lower mind, the five *jnanendriyas* or sense organs, and the five *karmendriyas* or organs of action, all of which originate from *sattwaguna*. The five *pranas* or vital life forces originate from *rajoguna* and the five *tanmatras* leading to the five *mahabhutas*, *tattwas* or elements – *akasha*, *vayu*, *agni*, *apas* and *prithvi*, or space, air, fire, water and earth, originate from the *tamoguna* of *ahamkara*.

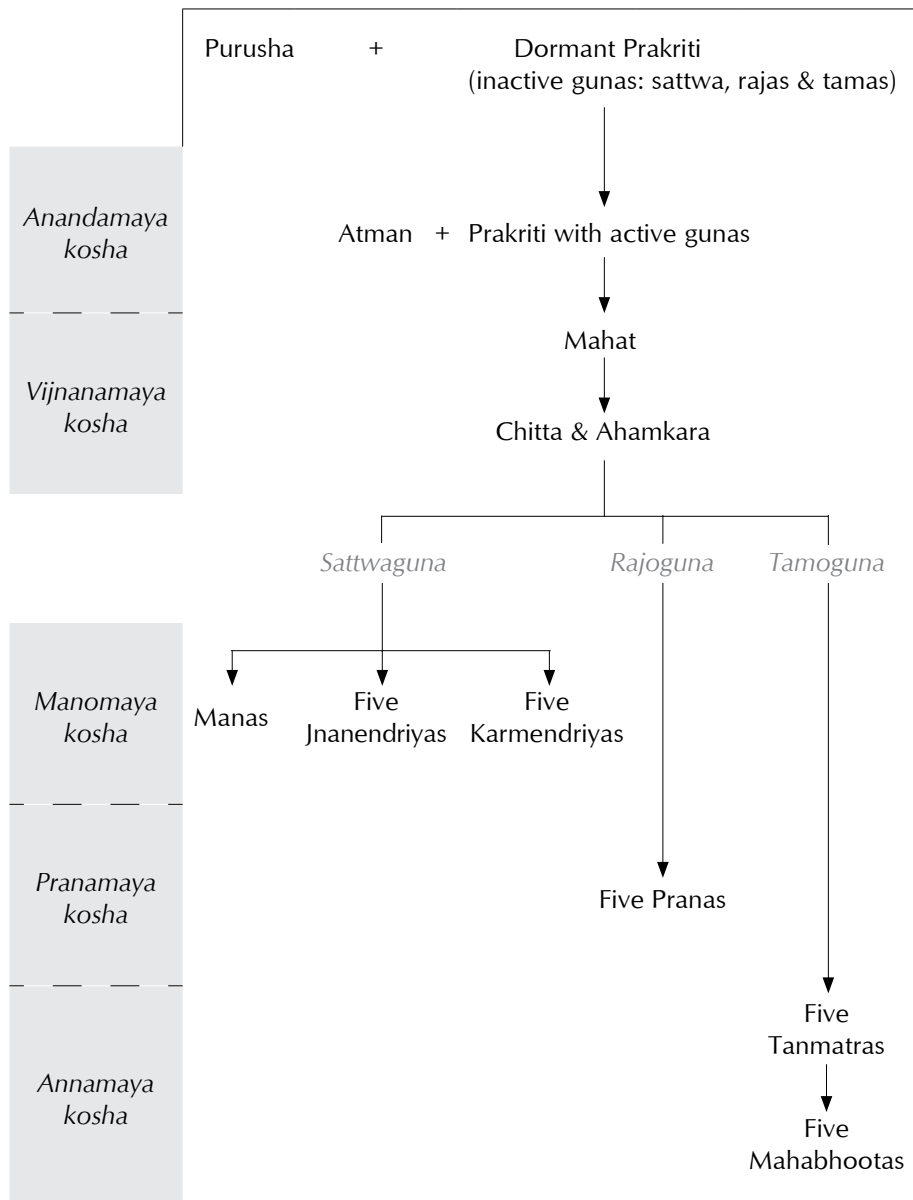
The three *gunas*, *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, are inherent in *Prakriti*, nature. When the *gunas* are in equilibrium, *Prakriti* is dormant, quiet. When they lose their balanced state, *Prakriti* becomes active and creation begins. The *gunas* are the cause of creation, the cycle of birth and death, and the inherent qualities of all that is created. Every created being is constantly subjected to the influence of these *gunas* – its own *gunas* and those of the environment.

Sattwa represents luminosity, harmony, purity, equanimity and contentment. *Rajas* represents activity, desire, attachment, change and growth. *Tamas* represents inactivity, impurity, ignorance and decay. The *gunas* are ever changing and in constant interplay. They are responsible for the wide spectrum of individual natures in all beings throughout the universe and their myriad interactions.

Samkhya literally means 'numbers'. It is a science of spirit which deals with the twenty-four attributes of our nature. These twenty-four attributes of human nature, the pure and the impure, the causal, the subtle and the gross, have been described in Samkhya.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Creation according to Samkhya



From the Samkhya point of view, reality is perceived as having two aspects, nashwara and ishwara. Nashwara is the decaying principle, appearance and the manifest dimension. Ishwara is the non-decaying principle, reality and the non-manifest dimension. The Samkhya system talks of one reality having two forms. In one form the process of growth and decay takes place continuously: creation, preservation, transformation and destruction. In the other form there is one continuous state of being. So we can say that nashwara is 'becoming' and ishwara is 'being'.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The koshas

Kosha means body. According to yoga, everything that exists has five bodies. Different species have different levels of development of each of these bodies; some of them may even be rudimentary. The most gross of the five is the physical body or *annamaya kosha* constituted by the five mahabhutas. It is developed in living and non-living beings. The next is the vital energy body or the *pranamaya kosha* constituted by the five pranas. It is developed in every living being including plant life and unicellular organisms but is subdued in non-living objects. Manas along with the five jnanendriyas and five karmendriyas constitute *manomaya kosha* or the mental body. Its function is to perceive, cognize and interact with the external environment. It is rudimentary in lower forms of living beings like plants, but as life forms evolve it becomes more and more active. In humans it is well developed but not fully. It is said in the yogic scriptures:

Consciousness sleeps in minerals, is aware in plants, walks in animals, thinks in humans and expresses as a realized, liberated person.

The subtler koshas namely manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas are dormant and non-functional in non-living beings. Mahat and ahamkara together constitute

vijnanamaya kosha or the body of knowledge and information. It holds knowledge collected over previous lives and the idea of self-identity of the individual soul. This knowledge in the form of impressions is called *samskara*. It is partly developed in higher animals. They manifest this knowledge in the form of instincts and habits. Vijnanamaya kosha is not easily accessible to most people, but one can occasionally, spontaneously have a glimpse of it. By internalizing the awareness during meditation practices one can cultivate the ability to access it at will. The basic nature, emotional reactions, intuition knowledge, ego and ego-related behaviour arise from this kosha. One can connect to other living beings at a subtle level through this kosha.

The koshas are the five dimensions of human existence in life and these five dimensions are activated and regulated with the practices of yoga. The journey from the outer fringes of our nature to the source of our nature is known as awareness of the koshas. We do not know when the koshas change, and they keep changing from annamaya, to pranamaya, to manomaya, again to pranamaya, to annamaya, to vijnanamaya and so on. Mental attentiveness leads us step by step through these different areas of consciousness towards the centre of consciousness. When we reach the centre of consciousness, the point where it began, there is only harmony, bliss, ananda.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Prakriti, along with the gunas constitute the *anandamaya kosha* or the bliss body. It is dormant in all life forms. In human life it reveals itself on rare occasions. The individual then experiences unexplained joy, peace and a sense of completeness and expansion. Except for these rare moments this dimension is totally unapproachable. Only a spiritually evolved soul can develop or awaken this kosha and remain in it all the time. Atman or the soul is the occupant of these five bodies. It is the knower and witness of everything.

The purpose of atman to take birth on this planet is to realize its true nature as part of cosmic consciousness. It comes equipped with the five sheaths or bodies. The anandamaya kosha represents its basic nature of *sat* or truth, *chit* or consciousness and *ananda* or bliss. It is usually hidden or inaccessible. An individual will recognize this kosha at the experiential level. The vijnanamaya kosha is the collection of all impressions bearing information and wisdom about the self in relation to the external experiences.

The atman travels with these two koshas life after life on its journey to self-realization. The other three koshas change with every birth. Heredity and environment in the form of food, air and exposure to various physical, mental and emotional experiences influence the contents and quality of the annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya koshas. Parents and society can positively contribute in giving strong, healthy equipment, namely these three koshas, to the child. It will help the new being in its efforts to attain and experience the vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas in its life.

Parents and society can help before conception, during pregnancy and in the early period of life of an individual soul. Giving positive, healthy and uplifting input to these three koshas is of great value. Natural food nourishes the physical body, annamaya kosha. A balanced lifestyle of rest and activity, an awareness of one's needs and aspirations and a positive attitude increases the amount of prana. Optimistic, sattwic thoughts, an attitude of goodwill and friendship towards all feeds the mind with confidence, courage and contentment.

The philosophies of the world are nothing but stories of humanity's eternal struggle. They are the milestones of humanity's free, unbound thinking and the products of the mental churnings of the seers of the various ages. The single purpose behind this thinking and effort has been elimination of pain and attainment of bliss.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

2

Ashramas and Samskaras

The ability to experience the different stages of life without any inner conflict represents the ongoing process of perfection.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The desire to bring order into this wondrous creation which exists within and around us is inherent in human nature. The experience of life would otherwise be too overwhelming. Following the example of nature, Prakriti, people of ancient times applied the same principles: birth, growth, decay and dissolution, seasonal and cyclic patterns and the search for excellence and perfection.

The four ashramas and the sequence of samskaras, markers on the journey, are examples for this man-made order.

ASHRAMAS

According to the vedic tradition and its scriptures, the life of every human being progresses in an orderly fashion. The life span is divided into four distinct periods or *ashramas* of twenty-five years. They are the *brahmacharya ashrama* or student life, the *grihastha ashrama* or householder life, the *vanaprastha ashrama*, the time of withdrawal from complete

involvement in the world and re-evaluating the spiritual dimension of one's life, and finally the *sannyasa ashrama*, when one fully turns to spiritual sadhana.

The concept of ashramas is explained as forms of disciplines that need to be observed at various stages of the human life cycle. There are three disciplines of the body, mind and soul:

The first discipline is brahmacharya, physical restraint, keeping the sexual life healthy, which is necessary in adolescence and young adulthood. The race which does not value this restraint is bound to be annihilated one day.

After that, in household life or the grihastha ashrama, there is the discipline of the mind, maintaining proper control over food and sleep, moderation in sense enjoyments and keeping anxiety under control.

The third, spiritual discipline of atmasanyam is appropriate after middle age in the vanaprastha ashrama. In this discipline the mind is always kept focused on God. There are two ways to practise this. One is through worship, by doing japa, singing bhajans and having satsang. The other is to join a spiritual organization, do social service and worship God by selflessly serving his multitudes of manifest forms. After retirement one doesn't stop working. At that time the work is to concentrate the mind on God and remain focused on Him. This becomes the discipline of the soul.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

During these ashramas, each moment of transition or entry into a new area of experience and growth is marked or initiated with a samskara. Samskaras are vedic rituals which relate the individual to the Creator at every stage of life, making life a happy journey to the Supreme. There are certain samskaras performed at prescribed times throughout

the life of an individual starting from before a being is conceived in the mother's womb and until after death. They include invocation of benevolent and protective cosmic forces with mantras, appropriate prayers, offerings to please these forces and sharing the joy (or sorrow in case of the last rite at the time of death) with other members of the community.

These rites and rituals are beyond the grasp of intellect and reasoning, yet they give meaning, comfort and direction to those who believe in the wisdom of the ancient seers and sages.

SAMSKARAS

Garbhadhana – entering the womb

The first samskara of a being is performed by the parents, when they invite a soul, *jiva*, and life enters the womb. The parents perform the ritual of purification with mantras and conception takes place in the most auspicious environment. The child is given the best possible conditions and qualities for life.

When the child is in the womb, you can train him there, rather than trying to change and brainwash him when he is born.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

This samskara is meant to ensure that the children will become good citizens and helpers of society. The sankalpa of garbhadhana samskara is:

May I please the Supreme Lord for providing a purified and perfect embryo in my wife's womb during each of her conceptions.

It is a spiritual act to give a suitable body for a developed soul and help its further evolution. The concepts of maintaining good health, a positive state of mind, regular and balanced lifestyle, avoiding pollution in food and air and avoiding

marriage in blood relations are complementary to the idea of purifying the parents through garbhadhana samskara and were equally recommended in vedic culture.

Pumsavana – first movement in the womb

In the third month of pregnancy the first movements of the foetus begin but are felt by the mother from the fifth month onwards. The parents use this event to bestow a positive influence on the new being by chanting mantras. The pregnant mother is encouraged to contemplate upon good virtues that the foetus may imbibe. Satsang and reading inspiring literature during pregnancy is recommended.

The child's education begins the moment it sees the light of day. It can even be said that it begins in the mother's womb. Whatever habits of thought, action and feeling are formed in an individual's early days last throughout his life.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Simantonnayana – the mind is born

In the fifth month the mental faculties of the unborn child start developing. Traditionally the mother is now surrounded by the most sattwic environment of inspiring stories, chanting and friendly interactions with others to further influence the nature of the child in a positive manner. This samskara reminds her to be careful of what external and internal environments she subjects herself to.

Three kinds of transfer take place from the mother's body into the child's body. One is the physical substance through the umbilical cord, the second is the pranic transfer in the form of vibrations after the third month, and the third is the transfer of the soul through the mother's body into the child's body.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Jatakarma – the moment of birth

The umbilical cord is cut and the child lives no longer on the prana of the mother but on its own prana. It is the first breath into an independent life. Jatakarma samskara has four parts: The first part is known as *soshyantikarma* and includes hymns invoking help of the divine power for removal of all obstructions in the birth canal and easy and safe delivery of the baby and placenta or afterbirth.

The second part is *medha-janan* or invocation for intellect. The father, with his fourth finger and an instrument of gold, a spoon, gives honey and ghee or ghee alone to the child. He utters:

Bhur I put into thee;
Bhuvah I put into thee;
Svaha I put into thee;
Bhur bhuvah svaha everything I put into thee.

Then the full *Gayatri* mantra is recited which contains a prayer for stimulating intellect and talent.

*Om bhoorbhuvahsvahtatsaviturvarenyam.
Bhargodevasyaadheemahidhiyoyo nahprachodayaat.*

The substances with which the child was fed, ghee, honey, gold, are also conducive to mental growth. This samskara indicates concern for the intellectual wellbeing of the child.

The third part is *aayushya*, the rite for a long life of the child. The father murmurs near the navel, the centre or storehouse of pranic energy, or near the right ear of the baby:

Agni is long-lived; through the trees he is long-lived.
By that long life I make you long-lived.
Soma is long-lived; through the herbs he is long-lived.
By that long life I make you long-lived.
The Brahman is long-lived; through the ambrosia he is long-lived. By that long life I make you long-lived.
The rishis are long-lived; through the observances they are long-lived. By that long life I make you long-lived.

Sacrifice is long-lived; through the sacrificial fire he is long-lived. By that long life I make you long-lived. The ocean is long-lived; through the rivers he is long-lived. By that long life I make you long-lived.

The fourth rite is for strength, for a hardy and pure life of the child. The father asks the baby:

Be strong as a stone,
Be sharp as an axe,
Be imperishable as gold.
You indeed are my own child.
Thus live a hundred autumns.

After this the mother is honoured and praised. The baby is thus purified, blessed and welcomed through performance of jatakarma samskara. On the sixth night after the birth the higher forces are invited to write the destiny of the new-born in this current life.

Namkarana – a name is given

Ten days after the purification rites of mother and child have been completed the child becomes known by a name. It is welcomed with havan and chanting of mantras and introduced to the larger family.

Nishkramana – meeting the world

Soon after namkarana, the child is taken outside the protection of the home to meet Mother Nature: her elements, plants, animals. It is the first contact with the world it will live in.

Annaprasana – first solid food

At the age of six months the child is given its first morsel of solid food. Until then it had been fed solely on the mother's milk. Besides preparing the body to assimilate solid food, the ceremony is an invocation of speech for soon the child will say its first words.

Chudakarana – first shaven head

At the age of twelve months the nails are cut and the head is shaved. Nails and hair are considered dead matter and removing them gives strength and vitality.

Until the age of seven years, the mother is the guru of the child. She is responsible for the development of all the desired qualities, such as love, compassion and intelligence. Just as the gardener looks after a small plant, she too provides for the total care and nutrition of the child. The compost and the manure are derived from her blood and bone marrow. She is like the farmer who gives urea to the plant when it is growing. Once the plant is fully grown, urea is no longer useful. In the same way, giving nutrition to a baby is the mother's responsibility, and that nutrition does not mean only feeding, it is all-inclusive. Thus the mother is the most important factor in the child's early life.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA

In this ashrama, the effort is aimed at improving the quality and creativity of *buddhi*, the intellect or intelligence. The intellect is the motivator of every action. The more you mature and the more understanding and knowledge you develop, the more capable you become of performing an activity. When an action is well thought out, when wisdom is used appropriately, then the outcome is good, and you aspire to work harder and attain happiness through positive actions.

In brahmacharya ashrama you learn and develop the skills to survive in the material world. The brahmacharya ashrama becomes the platform to imbibe social skills. The focus is 90% on learning, education, excelling in studies, and 10% on spiritual life. The student connects

to the 10% through the *Gayatri* mantra which is recited twenty-four times every morning.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Upanayana – born to knowledge

Upanayana samskara is performed at the age of eight years. The child is initiated into the *Gayatri* mantra, the ritual consisting of surya namaskara, nadi shodhana pranayama and prayer or offering to the sun, water, earth, fire, air and space, and all directions. A vow of observing celibacy for the next twelve years is made. The *Gayatri* mantra bestows wisdom and the ability to imbibe knowledge, surya namaskara contributes to good health, nadi shodhana pranayama balances the pranic energy and makes the mind calm and alert, and the prayer to the elements is a thanksgiving for supporting life. In return a promise is made to protect and not to abuse the elements or nature. These practices help the child to stay connected to its inner spirit and the cosmos.

Until now the mother was the most important teacher, now the guru or teacher guides and introduces the child to the world of learning, understanding and wisdom.

Reversal of the apanic flow is actual celibacy according to both tantra and yoga, and it is used to overcome or transcend the natural programming of human identity, personality and desire.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Gayatri mantra

Initiation into *Gayatri* mantra is conducted with havan and chanting of mantras.

There is a wide gulf when comparing the present education system with the ancient gurukul system.

Every student in the gurukul had a knowledge of pranayama, mantra, yogasana, the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the Upanishads. Every student possessed the qualities of humility, self-restraint, obedience, the spirit of service and self-sacrifice, a courteous nature, and last but not least a desire for acquiring *atmajnana*, knowledge of the Self. This was the predominant feature of the ancient gurukul culture.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Keshanta – becoming adult

At the age of sixteen, after spending time with the teacher or preceptor, the young student is initiated into adulthood. Again hair and nails are cut and a cow is offered to the preceptor.

Samavartana – transition

With this samskara which includes a sacrificial bath, the young adult leaves the preceptor, the brahmacharya ashrama, and enters the next stage of life, as a responsible householder and member of the community.

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA

Vivaha – marriage rite

Marriage is an important event and carefully prepared. It is one of the most important samskaras. The couple has the responsibility to continue the lineage and provide descendants of good quality who in turn will maintain the *gotra* or lineage. Therefore, the choice of husband and wife is not a random affair but based on many factors and attributes which need to match.

The purpose, aim and destination of all householders should be to purify, train, improve and modify themselves from moment to moment, in whatever circumstances they have been placed.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Householder life is the second stage in life, when one engages in responsibilities towards family and society and tries to fulfil one's ambitions and aspirations. One works towards fulfilling desires and ambitions with the constant awareness of *dharma*, the righteous behaviour.

The focus in grihastha ashrama is not the brain. In this ashrama, it is action, not intellect, which predominates. You give expression to the knowledge, skills and learning which you earned in brahmacharya ashrama. In grihastha ashrama, actions have to be refined, and actions are refined through experience.

In grihastha ashrama, you have to deal with your responsibilities, duties and commitments towards the family, towards society and towards the community. When the next generation is ready to fulfil the duties, you hand over your responsibilities, obligations and duties to them. At this stage, you are freed from your responsibilities and enter into the third stage.

Grihastha ashrama is the platform to imbibe the dharmic skills, to do everything in the right manner for the upliftment of everyone. You have a dharma with family and friends, a dharma in society and at the workplace, you have dharmic commitment.

In grihastha ashrama the material component is 75% for profession, family and social life, and the spiritual component is 25%. The 25% is necessary to release your stress. You need to clear your mind of tensions, give clarity to your understanding, relax and become creative.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA

Vanaprastha ashrama is a spiritual initiation, providing the individual with the necessary tools to master this stage of life. Ashram visits, pilgrimages, study and chanting of scriptures are part of this samskara. Family and social responsibilities are handed over to the next generation.

The predominant spirit or focus in vanaprastha ashrama is bhava, sentiment or emotions, and the aim is to cultivate sattwic emotions. This is important. At this stage, you are free from the obligations of society, profession and family. Of what use is the intellect now? What purpose do actions have now? Therefore, in this stage you refine and redefine the emotions. A new voyage begins. The external journey ends and the internal journey begins.

You need to acquire and imbibe equanimity, serenity, balance, wisdom and understanding. However, these conditions will only develop if the heart is cleaned. For cleaning the heart the process is very simple: *swadhyaya*, study; *satsang*, acquiring new thoughts, ideas, inspirations, aspirations; and *sadhana*, making the effort to change an existing condition and realizing the value or the worthlessness of a certain condition. For cleansing the heart, the ancient seers have also advised *aradhana*, worship; going on pilgrimages, mantra chanting, performing poojas and visiting ashrams.

After retirement you enter vanaprastha, and the percentage is 50% material and 50% percentage spiritual. With this untangling you become more humble, more open, less arrogant and committed to developing the better, the positive qualities in life.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

SANNYASA ASHRAMA

In the sannyasa ashrama, the discovery of the sixth element, the *atma tattwa* or spiritual nature, becomes the focus of sadhana and of every effort.

In sannyasa ashram there is 75% dedicated to spiritual life and 25% to material life. The material component has to be there in sannyasa life for you have to survive. You need to eat; you need a shelter. You are involved, yet the only difference is that you are not at home; you are in some other place. So the 25% caters to the basic necessities of life, and your 75% of spiritual life is spent in reading, writing, sadhana and seva.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Antyeshti – last rites

Death of the body is honoured with the last rites. Mantras are chanted, the funeral pyre is lit and the ashes of the deceased are immersed in water. Thereby, life begun in the waters of the mother's womb also ends in the element water.

At the time of death, all the relatives must be called and the dead body cannot be taken out until the eldest son comes. If he is not there or cannot come, the brother's son must be there. In India it is a religious duty to attend the funeral ceremony, even if one has some misunderstanding with that family.

These ceremonies are a kind of psychological diversion for the people, who are all feeling sad. At the same time, they also have subtle effects on the spirit.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

These samskaras, rituals, initiations and stages of life or ashramas are milestones on the journey of life. If observed with sincerity and faith, they keep the individual connected to the source of their own being, their natural and social environment and to the divinity present everywhere.

Four samskaras – garbhadhana, pumsavana, simantonnayana and jatakarma – relate to the first nine months of existence, from conception to birth. This shows the importance given to the beginning of life. It also highlights the responsibility given to parents and the family to create the best possible environment conducive to the healthy growth and development of the new being who has been invited to this world.

With the next samskaras – namkarana, nishkramana, annaprasana and chudakarana – the growth of the child is monitored until it enters the life of a student with its second birth into learning, knowledge and wisdom of the brahmacharya ashrama.

Following a yogic lifestyle is a way to instil positive, sattvic qualities in each family member and the atmosphere at home at every stage of life's journey. The period of pregnancy is a crucial time of reinforcing one's commitment to spiritual growth and evolution and to that of the future generations.



3

Woman, Mother and Devi

The form of God as Mother is the form that was there at the beginning of creation. The Divine Mother is the Adi Shakti. She is the Adi Janani of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, and exists in the heart of all beings. This Devi Shakti is the answer to all humankind's difficulties, poverty and sickness. This is what the rishis and munis of India have said since time immemorial.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The introduction of ashramas and samskaras reflects the desire and need to understand the unfathomable experience of life. In one form or another, every civilization made an attempt to understand it by dividing life into separate periods and regulating it with disciplines and rules.

It is no surprise that women were given a prominent role in early human society. They were most closely connected to creation, for new life came forth from their womb and was nourished with the milk of their breasts.

Adi Shakti is the first Mother, the first energy. The first creator is the Mother, and that concept is still found in most of the tribal traditions. Among the North American Indians, the South American Indians, the Aborigines, everywhere there is worship of the Mother. All tribal

communities have a female deity. They worship some form of Mother according to their own culture.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

In many civilizations, the woman was depicted in small figurines with a pregnant womb, full breasts and in the squatting position of birthing. Mother Earth and woman were one and the same: Shakti, Devi, creatrix, mother.

Devi represents the cosmic power of creation. Not only of the body but life as it is experienced at all levels and dimensions. The original concept of God is feminine. It is known as *hiranyagarbha*, the golden womb. The concept of God begins as a golden womb from which creation comes forth, and the womb is Shakti.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Probably no system of thought developed such a complex and refined understanding of the divine Shakti as the Shakta tantras. The highest principle, the one without a second is Shakti. Her foremost position is indisputable and worship of any of her multiple forms is considered not only the most ancient form of worship but also the most powerful. Shakti is energy, fierce and benevolent, at the same time she is the kanya innocent and full of joy, and mother compassionate, embracing her children, her whole creation. Shakti also holds the knowledge, wisdom, the *vidya* of life. In her ten manifestations as the Dasmahavidya, she symbolizes all that is to be known and experienced in the course of human existence.

The matriarchal system of society prevailed for millennia. It was valid for the food-gathering people and the people who had learned to produce their food. Life was organic, ecological and the woman was at the centre. Goddesses ruled as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and partners to gods who played a subordinate role.

Anthropological research shows that primitive man lived in matriarchal societies on every continent around the globe. Worship of the Divine Mother was developed in such societies. This kind of worship was popular and soothing to the mind as no other relationship could exceed the feeling of the mother for her child.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Only slowly did the gods in heaven take on the dominant role as men established the patriarchal system of ruling on earth.

The sacred process of engendering, bearing and bringing forth new life was reduced to a mundane role of producing male offspring for the continuation of the family line. Women became secondary citizens, had less or no rights and were reduced to a commodity: useful and hard working. Only through the arts did they continue to be worshipped and glorified.

The social traditions relegated the Mother to the background in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and many forms of Hinduism, but the main factors responsible are not really spiritual but social. Due to this influence, the masculine concept of divinity spread all over the globe, and it was widely accepted that God is supreme and nothing is beyond God.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The situation changed once more. The industrial development saw men more and more involved in progress and advancement. The gap between professional life and the family widened. The various wars which ravaged many parts of the world changed a whole generation. As young men perished women had to take on the role of provider. More than ever they were responsible for the continuation of life.

The outcome is women who are self-confident, courageous, efficient and successful members of society. They have

become equal to men in all areas of human endeavour. Yet a price had to be paid. The role of bearing, bringing forth and nurturing children and new life has become just one activity among many others. Women are at the helm of multinational companies, occupy high government posts and rule entire states and countries. The years are spent in the pursuit of career and professional fulfilment. Home and family are relegated to a minor rung on the list of priorities.

Pregnancies are delayed, and giving birth when the woman has reached her early 40s is not uncommon. Pregnancies are planned to fit into a busy work schedule. Pregnancy has lost the status of being a special time in the life of the unborn child, the mother and family. This need not be so.

Woman is the mother of the three worlds, its representative and container.

All the beauty the world contains is sustained by woman.

There is no friend better than a woman,

No way better than a woman,

No luck better than a woman,

No tirtha better than a woman,

No yoga better than a woman,

No japa better than a woman.

—Shaktisangamatantra, *tantric text of the Uttara Kaula sect*

Yoga and a yoga lifestyle can redress this imbalance and recreate the space, harmony and positive environment most conducive for the wellbeing of child, mother, family and society. The yoga chakra of the Satyananda Yoga tradition practised and lived in an appropriate manner, can enhance the quality of experience during pregnancy. It does not cater to the body only, for mother and child are so much more. The input the mother gives influences and shapes the entirety of the new being growing in her womb. The various branches of yoga help her to remain healthy, positive and happy. They provide the foundation for the mother to develop trust in

her own strength and qualities, and faith in a higher force, her guru, the Divine or cosmic goodness. This force is like a mother full of care and love, qualities which are growing and expanding along with the life within her.

The most powerful way to obtain grace was worship of the Divine Mother. The mother is always an embodiment of compassion and kindness; that is the pure image of mother love. She is the ocean of forgiveness. Whether it is the Divine Mother or my mother, wherever there is mother's energy, it is always in the image of love and kindness.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Yoga during pregnancy has been popular since the 1980s. The need was felt that the expectant mother and unborn child require attention and care. It was the role of the family, community and society to create the most beneficial environment and protect both from negative, harmful influences. The surroundings had to be peaceful, positive and uplifting on the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual levels.

In today's world no one is willing to safeguard mother and child. Women lead a 'normal' life of responsibility of profession, family and household almost up to the time of delivery. This goes against the understanding that this time is special and unique in the life of a woman and her unborn child. However, slowly women are claiming back their right to prepare for the new phase of their life and the new being that will enter it. Yoga can play an important role and enhance the quality of day-to-day life for mother and child.

Part 2

Enter Yoga

4

Yoga Samskaras

In this world all the wants of the child are fulfilled by the mother. The child's growth, development and sustenance are looked after by the mother. All the necessities of life, activities in this world and the energy needed for these, depend upon Shakti or the Universal Mother.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga is a tradition of integral yoga which allows aspirants to experience *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga. It is based on the six branches of yoga which can be learnt, imbibed and lived by everyone to create a healthy, harmonious and peaceful experience of life.

The yoga chakra forms the complete vision of yoga as seen by Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Swami Satyananda Saraswati. The outer yoga, *bahiranga*, hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, helps you to manage your senses and the interactive mind. The three yogas, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, are identified as internal, *antaranga*, since they help to manage the behaviour patterns and traits of your personality by managing the subtle influences that make up what you are.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Adding to these six branches of yoga, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati introduces various lifestyle yamas and niyamas to help bring harmony and contentment into one's daily life. They do not pertain to an individual branch of yoga; they are disciplines for a yogic lifestyle, disciplines which will enhance the quality of life for the aspirant.

Yamas and niyamas

In yoga, the journey towards positivity is made by practising yama and niyama. Various lifestyle yamas and niyamas have been developed by Swami Niranjanananda. The first pair for a yogic lifestyle are the yama *manahprasad*, happiness, and the niyama, mantra japa, repetition and remembrance. These two practices are ideal for anyone at any stage in life. They will no doubt enhance the quality of the pregnancy and the experience of mother and child.

Yamas and niyamas are the eternal principles that define the positive traits in life, representing a culmination of the human effort to experience beauty, peace, bliss, truth and expansiveness in life.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The six branches of yoga together with the lifestyle yamas and niyamas constitute the integral, holistic yoga. The purpose is to deepen the total experience and expression of the individual, to enhance the quality of life, interaction and being.

Yoga chakra for pregnancy

It is possible to adapt the yoga chakra to any specific physical or mental requirement, to any age group or to pregnancy while maintaining its unique and complete system: Young children are not taught shatkarmas or the practice of antar mouna. The elderly should not do headstand or bhastrika, but they will benefit from antar mouna. A person suffering from depression will greatly benefit from vigorous, vitalizing

pranayama practice, kirtan and karma yoga. These are just examples to show how the yoga chakra is not static and there has to be common sense in regard to an appropriate selection and balance between the various branches.

Hatha yoga

Asana and pranayama are two limbs of hatha yoga which are beneficial during pregnancy. An appropriate choice of yogasana for each trimester, for any specific condition and after childbirth are helpful to manage the sudden change in the body structure. It is important to avoid excess, stress and strain. Simple practices done with awareness and ease are best to maintain physical wellbeing. Hand and head mudras, ashwini mudra and sahajoli mudra can be practised to preserve the energy required for the mother's daily life and the child's growth.

The mother can develop the practice of pranayama throughout the nine months of pregnancy. Pranayama enhances physical, pranic and mental health and comfort. It is an invaluable support during labour and facilitates the process of childbirth. Shatkarmas and bandhas should only be done under the guidance of a competent teacher.

If possible it is good if pregnant women join a pre-natal yoga class. There a teacher with experience is ready with practical advice and understanding, able to guide and accompany the women through pregnancy. The support and sympathy of the group is also helpful and a source of comfort.

Raja yoga

Pratyahara, developing the ability to withdraw one's attention from the involvement with the external environment and connect with one's inner self, peace and harmony, is the most important practice of raja yoga. During pregnancy it is necessary to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of daily life. It is necessary for the mother to reconnect with her own needs, her own aspirations and with the child in her womb.

Yoga nidra, ajapa japa and antar mouna are the three basic practices which can be used at any time during the day. They give the woman the space to readjust, the time to breathe and relax.

Practices of concentration, *dharana*, are also beneficial as they strengthen determination and focus. More time is required for their practice. *Trataka*, gazing at a candle flame or an image, can be included with the practices of pratyahara or done alone. The ability to disconnect and to concentrate is certainly useful during times of discomfort, unease and during labour.

Kriya yoga

Through the practices of kriya yoga the aspirant connects to the *vijñanamaya kosha* and *anandamaya kosha*, the dimensions of intuition and bliss. Emphasis is given to japa, sound, movement of awareness and creative visualization. Here the mother can help herself and her child immensely. She can visualize a harmonious, healthy pregnancy, an easy, calm birth and a time of joy with the newborn. There are no limitations and the practice will continuously connect her to positivity as she foresees only good and pleasant moments.

Extended time spent in japa will help her remember the beneficial effect of mantra repetition, and she will be able to make use of it when required – to overcome physical discomfort, emotional imbalance and to strengthen her faith.

The expectant mother is relating to the unseen, intangible presence of her child yet with so much love and care that the life within her is as much a reality as the visible reality around her.

Karma yoga

From the moment the woman knows that she is carrying a child, she becomes a karma yogi. The attitudes and disciplines of karma yoga develop naturally. Her thoughts and actions become selfless, for the child is at the centre of attention. She learns the lesson of non-attachment as with

the birth of the child the process of letting go begins. She is also conscious of her limited role, for the wonder that unveils itself within her womb is beyond her understanding and control. She knows that some higher force, some god or goddess is looking after the wellbeing of all. However, she accepts that her input is of incomparable value to the child as it is nourished on all levels through her – her thoughts become his thoughts, her food becomes his nourishment, the images she sees he sees and the music she listens to are heard by the unborn child.

Responsibility and duty are the keywords which will guide her whole being for years to come. Pregnancy is just the entry to the world of motherhood, yet it is a time which allows her to wilfully and gladly open the heart to make every action an offering for the wellbeing of the child.

Bhakti yoga

The practices of bhakti yoga are all suited during pregnancy. There are no limitations to the expression and expansion of love. The choice of good, uplifting company, *satsang*, can be made consciously. Listening to stories and reading inspiring books connects to the beauty of life, the goodness and positive aspects of human interaction.

The joy of kirtan fills her whole being and that of the child in the womb. Mantra repetition pacifies the restless, uncertain mind, its fears and worries, and connects the mother with the force of the mantra. Prayer connects to the higher, divine reality in life. The mother knows that that spark of divinity is now also within her, and this knowledge helps her develop *atmabhava*, seeing the same essence in everyone and everything.

The positive qualities of kindness, patience, restraint, tolerance, acceptance and contentment are qualities which she will not only need to make her pregnancy more smooth, but these qualities are being imbibed by the unborn child and will shape the future life. Her faith that all will be well will be of great value as it gives her the flexibility to accept

medical advice without resistance, any change of plans or unforeseen circumstances. Her faith is also the foundation of the child's self-confidence and desire to embrace the many opportunities of life.

Along with the effort to create the best conditions and environment for the child, there is the deep sense of acknowledgement that not all lies in her hands and not all can be achieved by her will. There is a will which is beyond her limited one, which is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent and which guides her destiny and that of her child. The surrender to God's will, to be able to say wholeheartedly 'Let Thy will be done' is her attainment of bhakti yoga.

Jnana yoga

Swadhyaya is a practice of jnana yoga in understanding one's nature, character, behaviour, one's strengths, weaknesses, aspirations and needs. In this time of intense change, it is an important tool for life will never be the same again. No matter if it is a first pregnancy or if the unborn child enters a large family of siblings, for the mother the experience and her understanding are unique. Spiritual diary, antar mouna and the SWAN meditation are practices which help her come to terms with discomfort, mood swings, and the many necessary adjustments she will face.

The aim of jnana yoga is continuous purification. For a mother this is a natural process for she wants only the best for herself, the child and the family. *Pratipaksha bhavana*, replacing a negative quality or sentiment with the opposite, positive one, is probably the most important practice. The mother does not want to spend hours in anger, fear and desire. She does not want her child to suffer these harsh patterns of thought and feeling. Instead she wants to quickly replace them with forgiveness and kindness, faith and trust, with generosity, contentment, happiness and positivity.

Jnana yoga is not an obscure method for intellectual people, it is and can become a way to accept one's place in



the scheme of life, to enjoy the beauty and wisdom of life, and to connect to the all-embracing goodness of the Divine.

The yoga chakra provides the practices which makes this period of nine months unique for the mother and gives her the encouragement and inspiration to continue living the yoga chakra. The baby will have the best conditions to start life: positive samskaras, a healthy mother at peace with herself, and a home of love and harmony. The child will be born into a family of aspirants who strive to find and give peace and joy in life.

The yoga chakra is a complete system of yoga which helps the aspirant find balance and fulfilment. What is required is positive intention, sincerity and the commitment to make the necessary adjustments to one's lifestyle.

5

Yoga Lifestyle

Yoga is not something that is completely divorced from daily life. On the contrary, yoga and daily life must be made to merge into each other.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

There are certain basic rules of good living that are often bypassed in the modern way of life. These basic rules contribute to good health, happiness and harmony for the individual and society. They are necessary for mother, child and everyone. Not only do they help the mother to improve her environment, the baby also reaps the benefits of the mother's wellbeing and imbibes the habit of good living. The baby has a chance to grow up in a nurturing, positive environment and develops a strong, healthy personality.

Each suggestion and recommendation for living a yogic life may seem trivial, yet they have an enormous impact on one's consciousness and on the people around. Swami Sivananda's teachings on how to lead a divine life is a role model in yogic living. Regularity, regulation and moderation are the foundation of a balanced yogic lifestyle. Swami Sivananda put it lightly yet clearly in his *Song of Little*:

Eat a little, drink a little,
Talk a little, sleep a little,
Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, rest a little,
Do asana a little, do pranayama a little,
Reflect a little, do vichara a little,
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
Write mantra a little, meditate a little.

Along with the yoga chakra and its six branches, living a yoga lifestyle is important. Its backbone is the constant effort to cultivate positivity and connect to the *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* of life – to the true, good and beautiful that life has to offer. It is a yoga of attitude, a moment to moment practice which creates harmony and contentment within and in the environment.

STARTING THE DAY

Waking up on a positive note

After enjoying seven to eight hours of sound, restful sleep, it is a good habit to wake up one hour prior to sunrise or at about 5 in the morning. On first waking, chant mantras mentally or bring to the mental screen a positive inspiring thought, a prayer, or a good wish for someone. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati recommends that immediately on waking in the morning one should chant the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra eleven times with the *sankalpa*, resolve, for healing, energy, power, immunity and strength, followed by the *Gayatri* mantra eleven times with the *sankalpa* for wisdom, inner clarity, intuitive knowledge, learning, perception and opening the doors of dormant intelligence. Then the thirty-two names of Durga are repeated three times with the *sankalpa* to overcome distress in life and experience peace and harmony.

Thus the day starts with the auspicious vibrations of mantra and positive *sankalpas*.

Shaucha – cleanliness of body and surroundings

The daily routine of cleaning oneself and the surrounding may be the next activity. A neat and clean surrounding has a profound purifying effect on the mind. It encourages clarity in making decisions and actions and enhances self-confidence. Cleanliness is the foundation of good health.

Health-promoting activities

If the day's schedule permits, the early morning hours can be dedicated to health-promoting activities like yoga and a morning walk. Thirty to forty minutes generally suffice. A yoga session includes asana, pranayama and meditation practices. They develop inner awareness and encourage positive qualities in one's personality. Awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and behaviour leads to more understanding of oneself, eventually promoting physical and mental health and emotional stability.

One can then start the day's work. At this time of the day, the air is fresh, pollution is at a minimum level and the atmosphere is calm and charged with prana and healing energy. The two-hour period prior to sunrise is an auspicious time conducive to study, contemplation and spiritual practices

HEALTH AND DIET

Balanced and nutritious

Diet and food habits are equally important for health and general wellbeing of mother and child. It is scientifically proven that imbalanced diet, too little or too much of a food component, leads to a disturbed intra-uterine environment for the foetus. It even paves the path for metabolic diseases in adult life like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and mental disorders like schizophrenia in adult life. Easily digestible and nutritious food should be consumed during pregnancy. Dairy products, a variety of pulses and grains, a selection of available vegetables and fruits, supplemented with nuts and

seeds should be included in the weekly menu. There should be plenty of water and liquid intake throughout pregnancy. It is necessary that all ingredients are fresh, not preserved.

If morning sickness is a problem in the early phase of pregnancy, sipping a cool lemon and honey drink or warm lemongrass tea may be soothing. One should consume more liquid food in small quantities and frequently. Once the vomiting tendency is over then the aim is to have protein-rich food high in vitamins, calcium, iron and other minerals. Towards the end of pregnancy again the diet should have more liquids and be easily digestible as due to lack of space in the stomach, there is a tendency for reflux or heartburn.

Some tips from Ayurveda

According to ayurveda, the diet should be appetizing, *snigdha*, not dry, high in fat and water content, easily digestible and sweet. The diet should also stimulate the digestive fire with ingredients like ginger and black pepper in small quantities. Fasting must be avoided.

Special attention is paid to ensure free bowel movement and urination. Fruits are good for clearing the bowels and purifying the blood. Water intake must be increased if urine formation is not adequate. A cupful of milk and water in equal proportions has a diuretic effect. Heavy, spicy and stale food is to be avoided.

The time of eating

Food habits may change during pregnancy. It is better to eat a little less at every meal and increase the frequency of eating to compensate. Maintain regularity in mealtimes. Avoid lying down just after eating; wait for at least an hour. Dinner should be light and there should be a gap of at least two hours before going to bed. The digestive system has a direct relation to the solar rhythm. As the sun rises the digestive capacity goes up, and with the sun setting at the horizon it reaches its lowest level. There is a saying:

Eat breakfast like a wise emperor,
Lunch like a moderate king and
Dinner like a happy poor man.

While preparing, serving and eating the meal the mood and environment should always be pleasant. Maintaining a relaxed atmosphere while preparing and eating food contributes to its quality. Negative emotions like agitation, jealousy, rejection and sorrow adversely affect digestion and are also detrimental to the psyche of the foetus. Some women may develop cravings for a particular type of food or activity and/or repulsion for some others. These strong likes or dislikes may be fulfilled as it is believed that they have a deeper significance.

Regulate yourself if you wish to regulate your family affairs. Regulation is the song of life. Regulation is the law of life. Regulation regulates self-committable irregularity. It is a rare commodity nowadays, but no amount of feverish efforts will bring desirable results in the material and spiritual regions while a regulated life will enable you to master success in all spheres of life.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

HARMONY AND INSPIRATION

When we choose a 'yogic lifestyle', we do not adopt a new religion or become puritan overnight or change our external lifestyle. By adopting the yogic way of life, we are able to express our awareness better. We need to have a deeper experience and in order to have it, we must adjust many items related to our life - and that is yogic life. To live yoga is to be in harmony with yourself.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Balance in day's activities

The day's activities must be well balanced between physical, mental and creative activities, interspersed with periodic, short spells of rest and time for internalization. Being in nature is energizing, refreshing, emotionally stabilizing and an inspiring experience. If one can afford to be with nature daily, even for a few moments, one should not miss that opportunity. It can be in a nearby garden, at the beach, by a lake or just enjoying the open sky with stars, the moon, the rising or setting sun. The company of children has a similar effect.

Creating an internal space of stillness, balance and harmony will naturally influence the developing baby. Reading positive, inspiring literature and being in the company of virtuous people helps in maintaining a positive frame of mind.

Tuning in with nature's rhythm

Nature has a definite rhythm and if one can tune into it, the energy system of the body will work at its optimum level. The activities should be appropriate to the time of the day and season of the year. For example, the digestive ability is best in the morning and changes with the seasons. It functions best during spring and autumn when the climate is not too harsh while in extreme cold, hot or humid seasons digestion works less efficiently.

Promoting emotional stability

Mantra chanting, cultivating devotional sentiments or singing kirtan, may be included as a personal spiritual practice. These practices help develop and strengthen faith. Faith can unveil itself spontaneously from within or can be cultivated by contemplating on the goodness and greatness of God or guru. There must also be faith in one's own self. Awareness of one's strengths and limitations, honesty and sincerity in actions and thoughts lead to self-confidence.

Spiritualize all your activities.
Let your eyes look with kindness,
Your tongue speak with sweetness,
Your hands touch with softness.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Another practice is *pratipaksha bhavana*, developing the opposite positive quality. Anger can be replaced with forgiveness, greed with generosity, jealousy with happiness and magnanimity. It is a conscious choice to create the positive sentiment and to let go of the negative, aggressive one. Knowing the detrimental influence of negative emotion on the foetus will encourage and motivate the mother to make the effort and remain positive.

HAPPY AND KIND

Thoughts and actions, one's own and those of others, have a profound impact on the mind. During pregnancy this effect is transmitted to the developing psyche of the foetus leaving a permanent impression at the unconscious level. One's likes and dislikes, fears, phobias – the distinct behaviours that contribute to one's unique self – are in part the product of conditioned learning in the womb and early childhood.

A happy, confident and positive state of mind allows better synthesis of nutritional materials and better growth. It is therefore essential that the external and internal environment of the pregnant mother is peaceful, pleasant and inspiring. Family members can contribute in this matter. However, the most important factor is the mother's own awareness and determination, "Whatever may happen outside, I will maintain calmness and harmony within and I will make all effort to weave that environment around me." Goodness attracts goodness. Goodness cannot be expected free or without a price, it has to be earned by distributing it.

Strengthening family bonds

At the appropriate time, one should greet every family member with love and respect and enquire about their wellbeing and any particular need. This strengthens family bonds. In order to create such an environment, the first and foremost discipline is to create and maintain harmony and love within the family and the extended family.

In Indian culture it was a custom that a younger person would greet an elder by bowing down or with *pranam mudra*, joining the hands at the level of the heart. This was done every morning after the personal routine. The elder gave blessings and both enquired about each other's wellbeing and needs. Any minor dispute of the previous day was thus dissolved through forgiveness.

The second simple act is to remember to smile as often as possible. Smiles are contagious and encourage the other person to extend a smile in return. It is said that children smile and laugh 200 times a day, adults certainly less often.

The innocence, the simplicity, freedom from inhibition, the sweetest and purest smile, love and tenderness, these are the things which you have to relearn from children.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Beyond the home

When one has a desire to support and take care of people then more subtle practices become part of one's nature. attitude of helping and supporting, of maintaining discipline, and spreading smiles rather than frowns should be cultivated. This practice of feeling and expressing love can be extended to neighbours, work colleagues, friends and relatives in the form of sharing, trusting and cooperating as much as possible. Smiles and greetings are two simple but effective tools to convey 'I am with you'. Of course, it must be backed by actions of support when required, mere words do not suffice.

Along with being sensitive and respectful to the human environment, one should pay due respect to the fine balance

within nature and try to support and enhance it. Animals, birds, insects and plants are interdependent and humans depend on them too. All of creation is interdependent. One should use the natural resources of earth, water, fire, air and space with consideration and awareness as the continued exploitation and waste of these precious resources is certainly not sustainable. A clean and beautiful environment has a constructive, uplifting effect on the mind and personality. This effect needs to be recognized.

If you live only for yourself and your family, you cannot be happy. You and your family are nothing in this universe. When you and your family live for others, only then does your life have meaning. When you live only for others, God will definitely shower His blessings and grace on you.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

ENDING THE DAY

Practise ‘Review of the Day’. Learn from your activities and improve your interactions in the future. Avoid all involvement during this exercise and remain the witness. It is important not to ponder or brood too long. Then intuitive wisdom will develop, so the practice does not become intellectual. Finally, switch off the mind from the daily affairs by chanting mantras or practising meditation of your choice for five to ten minutes. Pray, wish well for yourself and everyone and fall asleep with awareness of goodwill, mantra and peace.

6

Adolescence – Preparing for Parenthood

I have only one principle. As long as the machine is functioning at an optimal level, the product will be of a high quality. Young girls are the manufacturing machines of the future. Males are only the operators. Therefore, we must educate, encourage and inspire girls to create a strong, vigorous, assertive community, not a passive one.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Yoga is a continuous process of development and cannot be learnt in a couple of years, but once you have practised, studied and understood yoga, you will find that your everyday moments become filled with yogic awareness. Yoga is not only asana and pranayama, it is an attitude, an awareness of your interaction with life and the ability to ensure smooth passage through moments of difficulty. Yoga is an ongoing process of education.

Education is not just an intellectual process or achievement. Rather, education plays a vital part in the maturing of the human mind and consciousness. Maturity of mind and consciousness is the aim of education, reflected in the ability to apply in practice the knowledge that you have gained intellectually. When you begin to apply what you know, the process of maturity of consciousness begins. When you are

able to maintain your balance, harmony and peace in day-to-day situations, that is maturity of mind.

The growth of an individual begins with positive interaction between the parent and the child. It is this period which is crucial and important for education. Our concept of education has to change from classroom education to personal education. This shift has to be made. How do we do that? According to the yogic theories, real education, intuitive education and humanitarian education stops around the age of seven and after that academic education begins. This education is imbibed through the family environment, the culture and society, and it is known as *samskara*, the programming of the human computer.

The mother is responsible for such education, but if a seed is rotten, whatever grows from it will also be infirm, weak and rotten. We cannot provide our offspring with the right *samskaras*. Therefore, it is my request to all the mothers and mothers-to-be to make a conscious effort to gain *samskaras* in their nature, personality and life, to express these *samskaras* in the family environment, and to educate the children with those *samskaras*.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

With the trend of having a small family the opportunity of creating a new being is becoming less frequent, maybe only once in a lifetime. Ideally the preparation for conception begins in adolescence. Adolescents of both genders need to be prepared for their future role as parents. Only what they have, can they pass on to their children. Water can run through a tap only when it is present in the reservoir. Adolescents also need to be ready for their role as members of society and for their responsibility for personal health, achievements and happiness.

Degrees and diplomas only serve as tokens of your highly skilled literacy but life itself has its curriculum and tests without any decorative rewards.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

A good parent is first a good human being who has developed their inherent potential to the best possible level. Therefore, the preparation for parenthood in adolescence is no different from the preparation for earning peace, prosperity and happiness in life.

In some cultures, when a daughter reaches the age of sixteen it is celebrated in a grand way as ‘Sweet Sixteen’. It is an indirect announcement of her sexual maturity. Nature contributes in preparing her for the role of a mother. As the girl enters adolescence she starts to look more womanly and developed. Her body grows for the function of reproduction.

Her pelvis becomes wider and roomy. Her bones become stronger and sturdy with adequate mineralization and calcium. Her body grows rich in iron and protein, and fat deposits are laid down in particular areas of the body, as breasts, hips and thighs. Breasts develop to nourish the future generation. Gentleness, affection and other softer qualities manifest in her behaviour. She can assist nature by making a conscious effort to contribute to this natural phenomenon.

Adolescence is a time of intense activity and rapid changes. The body is growing quickly and becoming strong. Intelligence is maturing. Adolescents are learning to interpret the meaning and consequences of innumerable experiences they are undergoing or have undergone in the past and they learn to take decisions accordingly. The mind starts dreaming about every sphere of the future and begins to work towards fulfilment of these dreams. It is the time for preparation for everything that life may bring.

Parents are only facilitators for children to discover their own aspirations in life and to grow towards these aspirations.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

A yogic environment supports the young person in every sphere of life. With a holistic understanding of yoga, parents can introduce attitudes and disciplines to enhance the growth of the teenager and family life. It is a period of uncertainty and confusion for in their day-to-day reality they may encounter bullying, academic pressure and stress at school. They may face moods hitherto unknown such anxiety, depression and inexplicable frustration. They have to deal with the awakening of sexuality.

Any practice that brings order into this turbulent life is beneficial. Parents and the youngsters can choose from the yoga chakra practices and disciplines which help to manage the changes of body and mind. A regular routine will establish a solid foundation on which self-esteem, trust and acceptance can grow, so necessary in times when many questions remain unanswered.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Good physical health is a great asset in life. It is the foremost requirement in anything that one wants to achieve and lack of health can be a limiting factor. Good health ensures strong, healthy genes and healthy progeny.

Eating well

A well-balanced diet, vegetarian or otherwise is important for good physical health. Meals should be freshly prepared and include plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Preserved and processed food, especially chocolates, snacks and aerated or sweetened drinks, should be kept to a minimum. The growing youth may eat five or six times (or as many times

as needed) in a day but only at specific times and not in between. Adolescents, who are still in the growing phase, may need to eat more than three times during the day, and ideally, these meals and snacks should be at regular times. It is good to sit down peacefully, to take time to clear and calm the mind, to bring in an inspiring or happy thought to mind before eating. Eating in a hurry or when upset or disturbed should be avoided. Plenty of water should be taken throughout the day.

Physical activity

The second requirement is regular physical activity, lots of fun and laughter, clean open air to breathe and sunshine. The answer lies in outdoor games on a daily basis. Not only does it strengthen muscles, joints, lungs and the heart, it sharpens the nervous system and reflexes, and releases mental pressure which can build up in a young person's life. Games and sport facilitate the growth of good attitudes in a playful way.

Yoga practices

The practices of yogasana and pranayama are a holistic approach to good health at the physical, mental and emotional levels. In addition to the benefits of physical exercise they balance the endocrine system and exercise muscles and joints including those that are rarely used. They improve flexibility and make the body light and energetic. Unlike sports and vigorous physical exercises, yogasanas do not encourage excitement, aggression and competition. Instead, they bestow a feeling of calmness, self-control, fulfilment and joy. Highly recommended for adolescents are:

- surya namaskara
- sarvangasana
- nadi shodhana pranayama
- bhramari pranayama
- yoga nidra.

While other yoga practices can be included, these form a well-balanced routine.

Sleeping habit

Adequate sleep at regular hours and rising early in the morning is essential. The importance of a healthy sleep pattern can never be over-emphasized. If the bio-rhythm of the body is in alignment with the cosmic rhythm, the solar rhythm of life on our planet, the innate energy system called *prana* works better leading to good health. Yogic practice recommends sleeping from 9 pm, and rising at 4 or 5 am. There should be a gap of two hours or more between the last meal and sleeping time.

The sleep pattern of 'early to bed, early to rise' has numerous health benefits. It improves time management, academic and personal achievements and the capacity and state of mind. Today's youth may find it impractical but it is worth experimenting sincerely with this time-tested concept for one year before rejecting it. It is a good habit to unwind from the day's activities before going to bed with yogic practices like:

- chanting of *Gayatri* mantra
- mantra japa
- 'goodwill' meditation (see Appendix 5)
- nadi shodhana pranayama
- bhramari pranayama
- ajapa japa
- yoga nidra.

These disciplines together will ensure good, sturdy physique and glowing complexion. Mental and emotional turbulence can be dealt with more easily, and there is open access to the spiritual realm.

Sanyam

One important discipline for adolescents, as for everyone, is the practice of *sanyam*, moderation, tolerance, restraint, control and self-control. Adolescents have to know and accept

boundaries, they have to become reasonable and respectful towards themselves, others and the environment. They must learn about the consequences of imbalance and transgression.

An area of great concern in today's world is the abuse of electronic gadgets and the misuse of the internet. Hours into the night are spent surfing, chatting and face-booking. The young mind is overloaded with information of image and sound. If there is no sanyam, no discrimination, the mental, emotional, even the physical balance is at stake. Parents must set an example and show the judicious use of devices. Meals should be taken without ipads, phones and television, sleep should not be curtailed due to late night chatting.

Along with the restrictions parents can offer alternatives and encourage to spend time in a more positive way conducive to a harmonious development. Social interactions must take place again in 'real time' and with real contact between people. Social media will never replace the affection shared when people are together.

The ill effects of uncontrolled use of electronic devices must be pointed out to the young people, for the quality of their future will be greatly influenced in a detrimental way.

SEXUAL ENERGY

Education

Understanding and managing sexual energy is the second area of preparing adolescents for their future role as parents. A good sense of hygiene, especially of the reproductive organs must be inculcated and should become a habit. Parents should expect that children are sexually motivated in their teenage years, simply out of curiosity. The youth should have adequate and clear understanding of sexual life, the responsibilities attached to it and safety precautions in sexual life. Either the parents or the school may take the initiative to arrange for this training from authorized persons. Information gathered from friends, books, recorded material or the internet may prove incorrect and disturbing.

Sex should not be hidden, nor should children be taught to be ashamed of it.

Management

During sexual arousal prana is awakened in every part of the body. Later it is focused in the reproductive system. At the time of the sexual climax prana and hence the body vibrate at a certain frequency. There is a free-flow of prana between the partners. The mind is sublimated and the consciousness transcends the lower mind. The unconscious mind or *vijnanamaya kosha* opens its door bringing the dormant samskaras to the surface. All the five koshas are exposed and vulnerable to external influences.

Sexual excitement in males is generally highest when testosterone levels are highest, between the age of 15 to 25. The upsurge in physical energy at puberty must be harnessed and redirected in a proper direction. Involvement in sports, playing a leadership role in any organization, a loving, respectful and responsible role in the family, travelling and hobbies can greatly smooth the bumpy road of puberty by streamlining and redirecting raw sexual energy. Yogic practices are also beneficial, especially:

- surya namaskara
- sarvangasana
- nadi shodhana pranayama
- moola bandha
- yoga nidra
- chanting of *Gayatri* mantra.

When students reach the age of maturity, certain growths and changes take place in the physical body. The voice changes, growth of body hair, sudden spurt of body growth. New emotions and sentiments arise. Naturally, the youngsters become curious. A clear knowledge of sexual health, hygiene and Brahmacharya, of how to attain longevity and how to control passion, should be

imparted to them. Parents should advise their children on the subject of Brahmacharya.

Mind, prana and *veerya*, semen, are one. By controlling the mind, you can control prana and semen. By controlling prana you can control the mind and semen. By controlling semen, you can control the mind and prana. Mind, prana and *veerya* are under the one *sambandha*, connection or circuit. If *veerya* is controlled, and if it is made to flow upwards into the brain by pure thoughts and the practice of vipareeta karani asana, sarvangasana, sirshasana and pranayama, the mind and the prana are automatically controlled.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

CREATIVE AND CARING

The body is only the external equipment controlled by the inner equipment of mind and intelligence. It is only a combination of pure mind and sharp intelligence that can use a strong, healthy body to harness sexual energy in the appropriate manner. So the third area of preparation is to purify the inner equipment.

Creative and nurturing activities

Adolescents should develop creative skills like playing a musical instrument, dancing, gardening, painting, or being responsible for pets. Like the yogic practice of meditation, these hobbies help in the growth of one's personality and inner strength. Regular practice of meditation on the natural breath, *trataka* on a *gyoti* or candle flame, and *yoga nidra* contribute to a balanced development of both cerebral hemispheres.

The left cerebral hemisphere is used predominantly in our daily life. The activities of the reasoning intellect, organized and planned actions, mathematical calculations, and the use of words are processed in the left hemisphere.

Creative activities and introverting meditation practices of yoga activate the right hemisphere allowing us to get in touch with our dormant intuitive and creative potential. They also allow expression of nurturing and protective qualities, and understanding in our personality. As a good parent we need to teach these positive qualities by example. To be a good and happy human being it is necessary to activate and balance the two hemispheres of the brain.

Respect

By setting a good example, parents should expose their children to good family values. Women of the family, young or old, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters, wives and mothers, must be treated with utmost love and respect.

You should cultivate a passionless mind, with an attitude of worship towards women. Give your respect and devotion to every woman, whoever she is. Whatever physical relations you may have with her, they are immaterial. Relationships with the opposite sex can be based on many ideas. A woman can be your mother, wife or partner, daughter, sister, or a friend. In all these relationships you can give her immense and total love. Sex is not the only way of interacting.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

In the tantric culture a woman is perceived as having the potential of a Devi or Shakti, an embodiment of energy that creates and maintains. Of course, nobody is perfect and every woman is a human being with her own limitations and we accept her that way. It is said that positive energy, such as happiness, peace and prosperity, resides in the family or society where women are respected. Daughters brought up in such an environment grow into mentally and emotionally strong and positive individuals, and thereby respect themselves as women.

Cultivating positive values

Parents may also discuss at the appropriate time, what makes any relationship meaningful. It is a good idea to expose adolescents to a yogic lifestyle and yogic values which help to improve interpersonal relationships. Only people with noble human values inbuilt in their personality have the inner strength to stand on their own two feet and provide support to their spouse, children, parents and siblings in times of need. Only they can spread happiness around wherever they are. The values they live as parents, their children will imbibe into their own lives. To have good quality children and to succeed in life one has to elevate oneself and develop a positive personality and attitudes. The real preparation for that begins in the adolescent years when one has developed *viveka*, discrimination, the faculty of intelligence which distinguishes between right and wrong, the appropriate and the inappropriate.

Yoga vidya, the science of yoga, proposes methods to develop positive disciplines or qualities which are called *yamas* and *niyamas*. The system of hatha yoga mentions twenty and for raja yoga Sage Patanjali mentions ten of which the more relevant ones for adolescents are *ahimsa* or non-violence, *satya* or truthfulness, *asteya* or non-stealing, *Brahmacharya* or restraint of senses, *shaucha* or cleanliness, *santosha* or contentment, and *swadhyaya* or self-observation and analysis.

Mahatma Gandhi, the freedom fighter and the ‘Father of the nation’ of India, emphasized another discipline, that of *aparadosha darshan* or refraining from finding faults with others.

Swami Sivananda Saraswati enumerates the first six of eight steps to spiritual attainment as *serve, love, give, purify, be good and do good*. He says, “Serve all and love all equally and without any expectations in return, not even a good name or fame. Serve and love all not as a duty but as a passion, with full involvement and a big smile on the face as if they are your near and dear ones.”

He further says, “Give, give and give; give with open heart. Give limitlessly and unconditionally. Give with love the best that you can give. Be good to others; pleasant, courteous and helpful to everyone, always. And, do good; do the righteous actions.” He also gave the *Song of 18 ITIES* which are eighteen qualities we should develop to become balanced and at peace with ourselves and the world around us:

Serenity, Regularity, Absence of Vanity
Sincerity, Simplicity, Veracity
Equanimity, Fixity, Non-irritability
Adaptability, Humility, Tenacity
Integrity, Nobility, Magnanimity
Charity, Generosity, Purity.

One should strive to cultivate these good qualities in life and closely observe one’s thoughts, words and deeds in the light of these qualities. One may think this high-value living obsolete in the modern world of competitiveness. Initially one may encounter resistance to one’s changed behaviour from society but sooner or later it will earn its due respect and bear sweet fruits both in terms of material gain and inner happiness.

In a world of liars, truth surely would be out of place, but there is a world inside you where falsehood and deception are most seriously out of place.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Looking ahead towards change

It is necessary to have short-term and long-term goals to succeed in life and to find peace and happiness. Adolescents should start cultivating the habit of setting goals in life and observing as well as analyzing their own self to give a necessary direction to their lives. SWAN, the self-observation practice of yoga, is extremely useful for this purpose.

The acronym SWAN stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Ambitions and Needs. Through objective awareness and

continuous examination, one should get to know one's strengths and weaknesses at all levels; physical, mental and emotional; one should try to fully engage with one's strengths and aim to transform weaknesses into their positive counterpart. Through self-observation and discrimination, one should be clear about what are needs in life and what are ambitions; what is absolutely necessary and what is fulfilling desires. This understanding helps to define the short-term and long-term goals in life and establish priorities.

A helpful practice for learning more about our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, is to regularly review the day that has passed. This is done without judging or justifying your behaviour, but instead, recognizing positive interactions and strengths, and contemplating how you might improve your negativities or weaknesses. Absorbing the learning and reflecting on ways to improve is *swadhyaya*, the practice of observation, analysis and regulation of your behaviour and personality.



There is only one secret of meeting the challenges of life; one has to be sincere and one has to be innocent.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

7

Birth of a Home

In the creation of nature, man and woman are complementary to each other's spiritual evolution. Anything that transpires between them is a necessary corollary to spiritual life. The process of coming together, living together, working together, sexually interacting together and meditating together, is so important for the evolution of the human life.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Good health, emotional balance and financial stability are the prerequisites before considering a marriage. If there are genetic illnesses or negative behavioural trends in the family tree, these should be considered, and any possible measures taken to improve or eliminate these conditions. Regular yoga practice contributes to physical and emotional health. Not everyone has the necessary temperament to share their life with others, whether spouse or family. A person who can share, who has patience and tolerance for other people, who is willing to understand and then adjust to other people and who is willing to give unconditionally without expectations of repayment in any form, benefits from marriage and is able to extend the benefit to the partner, and any resulting offspring.

“Can he or she make me happy?” is not the appropriate question. Ideally one should ask, “How can I make him or

her happy?” With this aim the marriage has a good chance of being beneficial and uplifting to both partners and the family they might be creating. When husband and wife, cultivate positive qualities together for their mutual wellbeing, then marriage will be a happy, harmonious experience.

The couple should have affection, attraction and respect for each other. Their likes and dislikes, thinking patterns, attitudes and values in life should be in harmony. They may not be the same yet there is tolerance and acceptance from both partners. Differences do not necessarily lead to discord or clashes.

With the vows taken at the time of marriage, the partners decide to marry because they want to grow together, they want to support each other, they want to create a home of trust, peace and happiness together, they want to experience divinity in sexual life and they want to parent children of higher consciousness.

There are many reasons why one wants to marry, or marry a particular person. One may not know or acknowledge the reasons yet they relate to all dimensions of one's being. On the physical and material plane one seeks comfort and wealth, name and fame, sexual fulfilment and progeny; on the mental and emotional level one seeks security, companionship, a complementary force to one's own limitations, a caretaker; in regard to society there is the desire to follow social customs, to upgrade social status and self-image through the association of a partner. There can also be a spiritual component in the relationship between two people. When the desire is strong to walk the spiritual path together, sexual life can be a way to experience divinity, to become parents of an evolved new generation and to create a home of peace, trust, love and happiness.

Harmony in every walk of life is a rare gift of the Lord to a couple. Each partner should be to the other a true companion in every sense of the term. Grihastha ashrama is a safe rung in the ladder of evolution to Godhead.

Follow the scriptural laws and enjoy infinite bliss. True union can be established on the spiritual basis. Both of you should aspire to realize the common goal of life – God-realization. Both of you should compete with each other in advancing rapidly in spiritual sadhana. What a novel competition! What a blessing it is to have such a competitor as your life-partner!

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

The child inherits the parents' external physique as well as internal make-up, thinking pattern, attitudes and personality traits through the genetic structure. One should therefore be vigilant in choosing a marriage partner. Every woman should make sure that the man who is going to father her children is a man of good character and human values. Similarly, every man should look for a woman of good character to bear his children. It is good to know the family background not from the perspective of wealth, power or social status but from the perspective of personality and lifestyle, because family traits are inherited and may manifest in subsequent generations.

Marriage is a great event in one's life. Many things change drastically. There are innumerable minor and major adjustments to be made by both partners. Even if they have known each other for a long time, living together is different from knowing someone. Each partner needs to dissolve the 'I', the self-identity and become 'we two'. The couple has to strive for perfect harmony, perfect union by 'giving' rather than 'expecting and taking'. The couple should start living a yogic lifestyle with yogic values. Thus, the internal environment of body and mind, as well as the external environment of the home will be pervaded with sattwic qualities. Evolved souls are attracted towards a good, pure environment.

When people begin to respect the sensitive nature and desires of each member in the family, then family life becomes very full.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The positive values and habits adopted and practised in the early years of life should be reinforced and strengthened. The partners can help each other to grow by understanding, helping, cooperating, by admiring and appreciating each other. It is unhealthy to live together in the same house with disagreements, suppressions and repressions influencing each other's unconscious minds. The key is to develop tolerance and understanding without grudges.

Peace and love should radiate in the home. In business associations, there is often an element of doubt; a lack of trust, the feeling that one has to be cautious. At home, there should be no reason for doubt or needing to protect oneself. One should be able to act openly and spontaneously. At home, there should be a deep sense of trust and intimacy which is not always possible in the world outside. An atmosphere of consideration, care, attentiveness, tolerance, patience and generosity should prevail. The only sentiment that can really change someone is love. The person who experiences love, radiates love to others. One has to be sincere in loving. Sincerity in turn demands truthfulness and selflessness. The importance of these qualities is understood as love grows between two people.

Rebuild your house on the strong foundation of love, peace, unity and strength.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

To be able to impart happiness and love to others, one needs to tap the endless source of happiness within. That is the true secret of happiness. Once one is able to do this, happiness flows. Knowing the source and how to connect to

it, one becomes an elevated person in thought and action. Happiness is within everyone's reach and one can hold it firmly through incessant and noble effort. The practice of *manah prasad*, the conscious effort to develop, cultivate, maintain and radiate happiness, is the first *yama* or discipline of a yogic lifestyle. The aim is to gradually increase the time of happiness every day, every week and month and at the same time develop the ability to be happy without a cause.

The relationship between husband and wife is multifaceted. They play complementary and supplementary roles to each other in every sphere of their lives. In the vedic era the concept of the ideal wife was:

At home she takes care of the domestic work,
In her appearance she is beautiful like goddess Lakshmi,
While preparing and serving food she is a mother,
In official work she is a secretary,
During the sexual act she is sensual,
In sorrowful times she is a friend,
In difficult times she is a navigator,
In righteous activity she is supportive
And in tolerance she is like Mother Earth.

In modern times these qualities and attitudes apply equally to husband and wife.

Wife is Shakti, and husband is not husband; he is Shiva. Shiva and Shakti represent two opposite polarities in two individuals. These two opposite polarities are not only between husband and wife, they are anywhere: soil and water together create something. In the same way, in the chemical, mineral, botanical universe, anywhere there are two distinct opposite polarities and they must work together to produce, what I would say, a first class genius.

The only point of unity I see in husband and wife is when both are sincere and aspiring for higher spiritual experience. Shakti holds the superior position in

spiritual life – not the man. To become an ideal husband and wife I can only give you one suggestion or advice: go deep into yoga and practise.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Planning the invitation

The sexual act is not only a physical or emotional act; with understanding, it can be called a spiritual flame of love. The couple on the spiritual path who want to improve the quality of their sexual relationship will find that meditating together or doing spiritual practices for half an hour beforehand will be beneficial. The couple who precede their sexual relations by meditation and an expression of concern for each other, experience sexual bliss that can indeed be a foretaste of the spiritual bliss. In a couple's sexual interaction, when neither seeks gratification at the cost of the other, the flow of energy comes from the heart and mind. The vedic culture was precise in prescribing rules and regulations of sexual activity. The sages and seers knew of the importance of the sexual act, abstinence and control. The purpose was clear: progeny, pleasure and spiritual experience. The decision to refrain from sexual activity was seen as a means to retain potent energy for other activities, physical, mental, and above all to accelerate one's spiritual evolution.

The true domain of a woman is spiritual. To bear a child and create a human body almost subconsciously is not enough. She can, by the power of thought and will, conceive and create a character capable of manifesting an ideal. In the Indian epic *Mahabharata* there is a beautiful story regarding the births of the five Pandava princes and their elder brother King Karna. Kunti, a beautiful, gentle, humble princess with high etiquette pleases Rishi Durvasa with her character and service to him during his austerities. In appreciation, Rishi Durvasa bestows a *siddhi*, a psychic ability, on her that whenever she wants she can invoke any God or higher power, and beget a son with the same qualities. In other words, her

son will be born as a master of the quality she concentrates upon and invokes.

Her first-born, Karna, son of the Sun, was born before her marriage. After her marriage with King Pandu she gives birth to Yudhisthira, son of Dharma, Lord of righteousness; Arjuna, son of Indra, king of all gods; Bhima, son of Vayu, Lord of the wind or air. Then she invokes two Ashwini Kumar, bestowers of health, for her co-wife, Madri, who gives birth to twins, Nakula and Sahadeva. Each of the sons personified the qualities of their mythological fathers completely. Karna was bright, strong, courageous, indomitable and strong-willed. Yudhisthira was righteous and truthful. Arjuna was charming, unconquerable, he excelled in whatever he undertook and was always victorious. Bhima was unparalleled in strength. Sahadeva could foresee everything. Nakula was excellent in animal husbandry. For all sons, it was the sankalpa of the mother which determined the qualities of the child.

The period of preparation starts with a harmonious life, with prayer and the aspiration and sankalpa to have a child. There is a state of joy and peace before the process of conception. It is said that if the couple is happy, the child will be born with sattwic qualities, if worried with rajasic and if sorrowful with tamasic qualities.

The parents may think about or visualize the qualities they aspire for their child, not only during the sexual act but also frequently during the period they are trying for conception and during pregnancy itself.

It is important that the whole family is ready to receive the new member warmly. The child must feel wanted and welcome. There are material aspects that need to be organized. A special space in the house is designated for the child; it is equipped and decorated appropriately. It is important that the family members, especially older siblings, are emotionally ready for the arrival. Father, siblings and other family members like grandparents, uncles and aunts should contribute to the planning and implementation of the preparations. The siblings and father should start including

the unborn child into the family activities as if she is already amongst them. Like the mother they should talk to her periodically, express their love and share what they have.

The more the family comes together to live a yogic life and share their understanding, experience, their aspirations and expectations, the more harmony will prevail.



Yoga is not a practice for grown-ups to overcome their ills of the body and mind but it is a lifestyle to be lived from birth to death.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Part 3

The Journey of Motherhood

8

Creation of Life

Stage	The Beginning of Life
<i>Week 1</i>	Fertilization and multiplication of cells in fallopian tube; inner layer forms embryo and outer layer forms placenta.
<i>Week 2</i>	Embryo travels to the uterus and is implanted there.
<i>Week 3</i>	Formation of nervous system and blood forming tissue begins to develop.
<i>After Week 3</i>	Placenta develops.
<i>Weeks 4–5</i>	Formation of heart and blood vessels, vertebral column, muscles and connective tissue begin to develop.
<i>Weeks 5–8</i>	Formation of internal organs, digestive system and bones, muscles, ligaments and skin begin to develop. Rapid development of brain occurs.
<i>Week 8</i>	Formation of nose, ears, eyes; external genitalia develop; ossification of bones begins; embryo starts resembling human form.
<i>Weeks 9–12</i>	The embryo is called foetus from ninth week onwards. Brain grows further, heart starts beating, movement begins and upper limbs are well formed.
<i>Week 13–16</i>	Lower limbs are well formed.

Stage	The Beginning of Life
Weeks 17-20	Hair starts growing. Movements can be detected by the mother; development of mind and rapid growth of foetus.
Weeks 21-25	Skin is properly formed. Lungs are mature. Development of intelligence; foetus gains strength.
Weeks 26-29	Lungs and central nervous system are sufficiently matured to allow foetus to survive in case of premature birth.
Weeks 30-34	Head down position; foetus develops its own defence system.
Weeks 35-38	Rate of growth slows down.

Development of subtle faculties

There is a general view regarding the physical development of the foetus from the time of conception to the first eight weeks, the stage known as embryo, and from nine weeks to the birth, the stage known as foetus. Medical science has not explored in depth the area of development of the subtle faculties like the mind. The yogic philosophical and ayurvedic views on these issues are not unanimous. In essence it is believed that *atman* or consciousness, *manas* or the faculty of perception, *hridaya* or the faculty of emotions and *prana* or the vital energy system develop at different periods.

Some believe that the atman or soul enters the body of the foetus in the fourth month of pregnancy, and until then it is just a lump of tissue. Others believe that the fertilization of the ovum by a sperm happens by the will of God and therefore the presence of an atman enters the ovum at the time of fertilization itself. The root cause of the embryo is atman, and without it the formation of the embryo is not possible. The embryo is formed by four sources: mother, father, food taken by the mother and the karmas of the unborn from previous lives bound to the atman.

The mother and father provide the genetic structure or the architectural plan of the future body of the child. The features that develop from a purified body and mind of the couple and their nourishment before conception are: freedom from disease, brain potential, to some extent personality traits, happiness, perspicuity or clarity of thoughts and self-expression, high quality *ojas* or inner strength, vitality and lustre due to prana shakti, longevity and physical strength or energy.

Food taken by the mother provides the building blocks. The features developing from *rasa* or the diet of the mother after conception are growth of body, nourishment, strength, health, contentment and enthusiasm or zeal. It also contributes in a minor degree to personality traits.

Atman is the most important and most constant factor in the formation of the embryo. The features developing from atman are: birth in specific species or environment, consciousness, *ahamkara* or the knowledge about oneself, *manas*, mind, *buddhi*, intellect, *smriti*, memory, *dhriti*, retention power, *sukha*, happiness and *dukkha*, sorrow, *raga*, longing and *dvesha*, repulsion, endeavour, longevity and perception.

The features developing from sattwic attributes or manas which accompanies atman are: different emotions and trends of character like devotion, memory, infatuation, gratitude, dexterity, interest and efficiency in work, grasping power of buddhi, intellect, *medha*, sobriety.

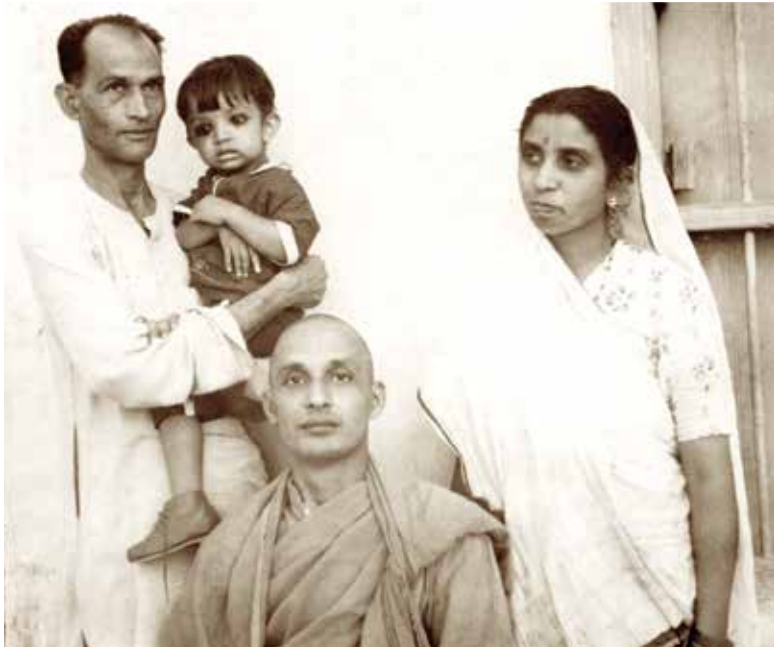
In the embryo *akasha tattwa*, the ether or space element, is responsible for increase in size, *vayu tattwa* or the air element is responsible for cell division, *agni tattwa* or the fire element for metabolism, *apas tattwa* or the water element for nourishment and moistening, *prithvi tattwa* or the earth element for solidification.

After three months the embryo has all the organs in rudimentary form and consciousness is capable of feeling pleasure and pain. In month four, consciousness associated with the heart develops enabling the child to perceive emotions. In month five, consciousness develops further

and the foetus becomes *sujiva*, capable to live independently. Until month five the foetus is living on the mother's prana, now it has its own independent prana. Later in pregnancy the organs, mind and consciousness keep growing and maturing.

Conception, pregnancy and birth are the beginning of life for the child, and parents are just beginning to be parents, yet they will never cease to be so. Their role will change and adapt along with the growth and development of the children, the adolescents and young adults who in turn will become parents themselves.

It is important to follow advice, recommendations and guidelines which may inspire and encourage parents to live the yoga vidya so that their children may imbibe positive, sattwic qualities from the beginning of their new journey. This will allow them to experience the *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram*, the truth, goodness and beauty at every moment of their life.



9

Swami Satyananda's Letters to Swami Dharmashakti

1 January 1960, Mumbai

It is good to wake up around four or half past four in the morning and do japa meditation. After half an hour to fortyfive minutes it is natural for the legs to begin paining. Therefore, change the asana you are sitting in after a while and rest the legs. If you do forty to fifty malas, that's quite enough. In this situation you feel very tired, sitting in one asana, doing japa, doing so many malas. At such times, if true meditation occurs even for five minutes, then life itself will change. If you feel lethargic after japa meditation, then sleep for a while. Focus your mind only on japa meditation, bhajan, kirtan, the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, mental japa while working, and contemplation of the ishta. Stop all unnecessary talk, do not be scared or nervous, maintain your faith in God and if your self-confidence begins to get shaky, take out your initiation letter, open it and read it. Continue meeting people. Follow the routine you have set for yourself strictly, do not eat in anyone's house and do not eat food made by anyone else, okay? Also reduce the number of times you fast. If people say things, ignore them; keep moving towards your goal. A bright future is awaiting you. Remember two more things. Continuously practise these, they will help you a lot:

1. Development of faith

2. Development of self.

Faith has a lot of power. The greater your faith in sadguru and God, the greater success you will achieve. You should continuously develop your faith and a constant feeling for your ishta. Develop the feeling, "My God is all powerful and He can do what He wants." Have complete faith in this. Remember, for a householder, faith is a boon and doubt a curse. Faith means having total belief in the powers of your God and complete selfsurrender to his wishes and words. As your faith develops, fear, unhappiness and apprehension will fade away. Do not let the mind be vacant, even for a short while. If it strays while you are working, do mental japa. Then it will not go anywhere. After all, the mind is the very root of all sorrow. Sorrow is its creation. Whenever you have the time, study the *Bhagavad Gita*, and understand it. Do not simply chant it. The first few times you may not be able to understand it, but gradually you will understand all of it. This will definitely have an influence on the child. A child is an image of the mother's temperament and behaviour. You have to first become the kind of person that you want him to be. Have high expectations and the child will be greater than the greatest. Whatever I had to say, I have said or written and communicated it to you. Now you know it all. Fulfil your duties towards the child well. The child is not yours; he belongs to the world and is kept with you in trust, for safekeeping. Give him good samskaras, teach him good things, give him a good education, this is your chief duty. Make him a true human being. All creatures eat, drink, sleep, wake up and produce babies. This is an animal's life. Rise beyond it. You do not need to make him a God. It is easy to become a god, but a true human being . . . !

Dharmashakti, keep doing your work well, you will receive inspiration and instructions from within, do not worry. Absorb yourself totally in sadhana and have unflinching selfconfidence. You will be able to hear my voice and instructions. Spend

your whole day in japa meditation and work, forget yourself, the only condition is that you maintain an unflinching self-confidence. Whatever else you want to know, you will get the answers in your own mind. You are filled with power that has been hidden by worldly attachments and attractions. Clean it. Your path is bright. Dharmashakti, the jewel that you will receive by the grace of God will help remove the ignorance of so many.

21 February 1960, Allahabad

With boundless joy, like a prayer from the Great Father, we received the 'news'. He is an incarnation of the light of God. Understand this well. This light of God has descended to illuminate even the darkest of corners. This is the embodiment of a pure perseverance and yearning. It is the yearning and perseverance of nature itself which has descended. He is neither your son nor their grandson. In fact, he belongs to nobody. He has had to come to fulfil a definite work. Our only debt is the fulfilment of our duty towards him. He will not care for any attachments of ignorance or a childlike lack of knowledge. We have to present him for a massive work, a work that is related to many souls. He has come with all the necessary ingredients. He has come as illumination. Always nurture him with the name of Rama. He is a precious flower who will permeate the whole world with his divine fragrance. Take care of your body and mind. Japa should go on constantly. No distractions from here and there. Japa meditation should be constant. God's blessings are with you.

11 March 1960, Khamgaon

I am arriving on the 16th. How is your health? You want me to name the child, then a name dear to me is 'Niranjan'. Do you like it? Always call him Niranjan. Don't distort it or shorten

it. He truly is niranjan. Shivanjali has sent the name 'Pranava' which is also good; tell her. But he is 'Mantra Satyam, Pooja Satyam, Satyam Devo Niranjanam'. Dharmashakti, with the arrival of Niranjan, know that you have been reborn. Mould yourself in a way that the future of the child may be greater than the greatest. Stretch out your arms and legs on the bed itself and do asanas. Constant japa meditation, no matter what your circumstances. No other rules. With every breath, Om Shri Ramchandraya Namah. Your life is pledged to God. A particle of God, the Rama-Krishna of this age, is in your lap. Your mind, body, thoughts and entire life are pledged to him. Dharmashakti, the plant is the best there is. The nurturing and weeding should also be the best. I have the confidence in you that you will be able to make this divine jewel truly divine. The grace of God is with you. My auspicious blessings to Niranjan.

14 April 1960, Bilaspur

Niranjan is the illumination of the greatness of God. Take care of your health. Think of the child always as Rama-Krishna. Don't say, "He is small, what will he understand?" This is the time to form samskaras. The atmosphere he lives in, whatever is spoken of in his presence, will all remain in his mind in seed form and will germinate when the time is right. Just as the words of the Bhagavad Gita are still present in space, so also are good and bad thoughts. Be careful. This is the time for samskaras. Finally, after everything has been said, the best dharma is total and absolute surrender, which means to dissolve and merge the ego self. You have to undergo a total dissolution so that I may manifest my ideas and power through you. To dissolve oneself is no joke. The only trick is constant and nondual remembrance, night and day.

31 January 1961, Chapra

Will return from Benares on the 8th.

Duty 1. Essays on democracy 2. Bhajankirtan 3. The book register 4. Constant japa 5. Asana 6. Anasakti 7. Brahmacharya 8. Freedom from worry. Teach *Rama* and *Om* to Niranjan, not Ma, Ba. Teach kirtan, bhajan, slokas, Puranas, katha and the Ramayana. It is not necessary that he understand them. Take him in your lap, address him as if he understands and regularly relate to him the Ramayana and sing bhajans and kirtan. No useless talk. While breastfeeding him, make a sankalpa of 'jnana' and imagine the knowledge gathering in the breast and pouring forth in the form of milk that is going into Niranjan. An auspicious sankalpa, faith in God, contemplation of knowledge, these are the actions to perform while breastfeeding. He has to be given the training of a sannyasin. You have to make him like Shankaracharya, not a little boy or a doll. Inform Ratan that she should sing slokas or the Ramayana to him. The soul will absorb it all from now itself; there is no question of understanding.

3 March 1961, Chapra

Whose responsibility is it to worry about Niranjan? If he goes the wrong way, it's fine and if he develops the right samskaras, it's fine. You people only have to do your duty. Oh yes, I forget, this is the mother's love, the natural mother's love, that is coming to the fore. Now I understand. But Dharmashakti, come out of this attraction and illusion. Who is Niranjan? Ask this of your innermost self. You completely dissolved yourself to create him. Now what you have in front of you is your great duty. Have faith in God and continue to fulfil your duty. Niranjan is truly 'niranjan'. Do not worry. Start reading the Ramayana daily and understand its meaning. In between, keep up the verbal japa also. I am annoyed with you because the pride of doership has awakened in you. The doer himself is

the enjoyer/sufferer. I am the doer and the results are mine to bear. You are all pledged to me. You are inert; I am the mover. It does not matter if you make a mistake. However, even then you have to believe that it was not you who made the mistake, but your God who pushed you towards it. Just as, *Ura preraka raghuvansha vibhushana* – “The jewel of the Raghu clan, Lord Rama is the one who inspires my heart.” Start learning the Ramayana by heart. Do you hear what I am saying? These days, I am finding you absent. I sent you a call for three to four days. What is wrong? Where are you, Dharmashakti? Think of this home not as your home, but as a classroom, where teaching is imparted not by reading or telling, but by doing it yourself. Satyabrat and Dharmashakti will have to stay constantly alert, give up all laziness, procrastination, attachments and ego, do my work and educate the great soul who is Niranjana. You will not have to tell him anything. Whatever he sees, he will do himself. Both of you have a great duty towards him. I repeat, he is not only entitled to your love and affection; he will be the leader both at home and abroad, throughout countries and nations, veritably the whole world over. Understand? Now, forget all worries and doubts.

16 March 1961, Munger

When you become empty or full, dissolve completely, or become void, then I will transmit the spiritual resolve and make you ‘Dharmashakti’. So far, I have only given you the name. Know that the spiritual resolve can only be put into an empty receptacle. So now, Dharmashakti, your surrender should be total. You should think, sleep, eat, drink, sit, do, everything only for me. However, you choose to do it, make this feeling of surrender serious, real and right, so that one day you begin to feel the same as you did when you carried Niranjana in your womb, because then everything that you did was for his welfare.

You have not reached this stage of surrender yet. The surrender you feel now is only a sentiment, not its true form. As soon as that surrender happens, the wires will be connected and you will receive my instructions from anywhere like through a telephone, to the extent that in the end you will feel that I am Satyam – Satyoham! This sadhana should go on constantly, like an obsession, even at night while sleeping and while talking. Gradually, every moment will become a sadhana of surrender. At first you and I will be separate. Then I will awaken within you. In the end you and I will become one. As your sadhana deepens, you will feel my presence; you will experience a sharp sensation in the body, sweat, heat, tears and euphoria, and what will happen in the end? It is a state of nonduality, of which what can one say?

Please remember that Niranjana was an experiment of mine, and that I am going to use the niranjana state because unless you become niranjana you will not be able to receive the power of Satyam. You gave birth to one Niranjana. He is a person. Now give birth to another Niranjana; he will come in the form of energy. Do not delay, be quick, every moment is precious. A lot of time has gone by. Now the time for you to find your wings is approaching. The samskaras from many previous births are fading away. Only 'my work' should remain in your inner being. Now bring yourself back, as my voice is becoming louder. I cannot wait any longer. I have to work fast. If you still cannot hear my voice, then try to hear it. Don't you even know the reason for which you were born? What were you before this? Don't you know your future? In the name 'Dharmashakti' lies the history of your future. Don't forget! If you forget, I will not forgive you, because I am a strange man. I dismiss those who only maintain an emotional relationship with me, without recognizing my mission. You have to become a siddha. Stop the thoughts. Only one thought. One thought only. That's all I have to say.

24 May 1961, Lakshmi Bhavan, Munger

Leela was given 'geru' on 25th May. Now she is Yogashakti. She is already nari shakti, woman power. If there is someone to guide her, she will become a great power. There are people who help women progress even today, but the form has become distorted. Today's woman becomes a lawyer, minister and magistrate. She flies from the lowest levels to the highest heavens, but she is not given the education to bridge the gap between two homes or to make peace when there is a rift between two brothers. That is why our country is in this state today. What or how Yogashakti is, you will get to know yourself. Rise above the influences, Dharmashakti. This is the greatest sadhana. Practise non-attachment. Restlessness is a fabrication of the mind. Sorrow is only an emotion. Stay happy and carefree. This is sannyasa. To immerse yourself in everything is worldliness. Sadhana is constricted by pleasures and pain.

Let life be as it is, stay carefree. For how long and over what or whom will you break your head? You do not have to do anything. You have handed yourself over, now the one who has to do it will do it. Become like a machine. You are attached to Niranjan. Whether he becomes good or bad, how does it concern you? The thoughts that come to your mind are wrong. You are Niranjan's nurse and I am his lord, his creator. If he improves he is mine and if he spoils then my possession will be spoilt. How does it concern you? From your side, you must only give him the right education. Having risen above your attraction and attachment, your only task is to raise him. Any concern for his future is my responsibility. Japa, dhyana, bhajan, kirtan and satsang from time to time; just this much is enough.

8 August 1961, Munger

In order for Niranjana to learn, both of you must do japa, dhyaana, asana and pooja. As he grows he must develop a respect for your mutual relationship. Respect is not taught but learnt by example. Do not get him into the habit of touching feet and don't force him to bow his head at the feet of any sadhus or pandits. Do not threaten him, scare him or teach him anything, only show him. You both are his makers. Remember, as soon as the time is ripe, he will have to study the shastras. Until then, at least for name's sake, read and recite the books in front of him. Tell Satyabrata not to smoke in front of him. Niranjana should never see him smoking. Recite the slokas in such a way that he enjoys listening to them. When I come I will recite the *Bhagavad Gita* to him. This is the time to sow the seeds of samskaras in him. The soil is absolutely ready. Only if you sow good seeds will the crop be good. Do you understand? Think of him as your charge, kept in your trust.

You are Yashoda and he is Krishna Kanhaiya. He has a lot of work to do. He has come with a lot of responsibilities. If you truly love him then keep his path clear and make it simple. Your responsibility should not be limited to love and affection. You have a great responsibility. Dharmashakti, as a model be Madalsa. In the fulfilment of your duties, be mother Kaushalya. Be Kaikeyi who wore the vermilion of slander in order to uphold her ideals, who cried but smiled for the world; do you understand! She drank sweet poison to give the world nectar. You are a mother, you have a mother's love, but what Niranjana is, time will tell, and time will also give you the strength to fulfil your responsibilities. You have to rise above the sphere of attraction, attachment and mother's love. If Jha Maharaj recites the slokas, it's fine. Maintain a friendship with him. It would be better if he recited the slokas to him in a playful manner, as a part of fun and games.

9

A Time to Connect

The mother is gentle, soft, sweet, tender and affectionate.
She is full of smiles.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Pregnancy is a special stage and state in a woman's life when with relatively little effort she is able to access her mind in its full spectrum and her inner self. She is high in pranic energy and lives with awakened prana. She only needs to harness this force to attain spiritual growth. Due to the physical presence of the growing baby the mother's prana is active in the lower two chakras. With yogic practice and awareness, she is able to raise this awakened prana to higher chakras like anahata, vishuddhi and ajna and maintain it there.

Any woman with an inclination towards spirituality has the opportunity during her pregnancy to enhance her spiritual growth by regular and sincere yoga practice. This will benefit her and the baby in the womb for life as well as the whole family and people around her.

A set of simple asanas help her bring the scattered awareness to the body. Singing kirtan, chanting stotras, performing pooja or reading inspiring books can elevate the state of mind. Music, creative art or a walk in nature may be the alternatives to shift the mind away from mundane activities.

The practices of pranayama stimulate prana and increase her sensitivity towards it. Bhramari, nadi shodhana and ujjayi pranayamas are useful for this purpose. Mantra japa with meditation, ajapa japa, internal trataka on ishta, external trataka on jyoti or a yantra which is conducive to peace of mind and good sleep are some of the possible meditation practices. Chanting and meditation on the universal mantra *Om* is a highly beneficial practice both for mother and child.

The pregnant mother can meditate on a particular quality like contentment, peace, love, selflessness which she wants her baby to imbibe. Another good practice is to regularly sing or read life stories of her ishta or saints of any tradition. The noble qualities of these exemplary people are indirectly contemplated upon by the mother and imbibed by the baby. Praying regularly for the baby and for everyone in the universe has also a positive effect. Greatly beneficial to the mother and baby is a visit to an ashram or holy place and to spend some time in a sattvic environment and the presence of a saintly person.

The pregnant woman may include the baby in her womb in all of her spiritual practices by being aware of this new presence and by sharing her internal experience. In quiet moments, she may become intensely aware of this presence and communicate her thoughts and emotions, desires and aspirations, teaching positive values and pointing in the right directions. Many attitudes and personality traits may be inculcated by talking, by exposing the growing child to a conducive environment and by living those values herself.

The first thing to do in order to educate the child is to educate oneself, to become conscious and master of oneself so that one does not set a bad example to one's child. As parents you should have a high ideal and act always in accordance with that ideal. If you wish to be respected by your child, have respect for yourself and be at every moment worthy of respect.

—*The Mother of Pondicherry*

It is important that the mother makes active attempts to establish a bond with the baby. The baby must grow in her womb with her conscious will. It is not that someone just happens to exist in one corner of her body, the unborn child is for nine months a part of her body, prana, her thoughts and feelings.

When a new life is flowering within a woman, she needs a motherly presence to calm her worries, concerns and discomforts, hold her hand and guide her to safety, comfort and contentment. Yoga can help to provide solutions to many of these concerns and give the clarity of mind and self-confidence to resolve difficulties appropriately and efficiently. Yoga offers a gentle and safe physical activity to stay healthy, flexible, strong and energetic. It helps to balance mood swings and brings a pleasant feeling of calm. It helps the woman to manage the possible discomforts associated with pregnancy. Yoga helps to prepare the body for natural childbirth with minimal or no medical intervention. It also helps the mother to fully recover physiologically to her pre-pregnancy state. Yoga gives her the wisdom of being a good mother, and enhances the optimum physical and mental growth of the baby.

Basic facts about pre-natal yoga

Many myths surround yoga for pregnancy, but the basic facts are:

1. It can start at any stage of pregnancy. However, it is not recommended for students who are new to yoga until after the first trimester.
2. The practice of yoga is not limited to asana and pranayama.
3. Not all practices are recommended during pregnancy.
4. An experienced yoga teacher can help identify the appropriate set of practices for each individual. It is a good idea to check with the obstetrician before starting any yoga practice in case of any significant medical condition that needs to be taken into consideration.

5. New practitioners of yoga should always begin their learning with a qualified yoga teacher. An experienced practitioner may continue on her own, relying on her own awareness, but she will definitely benefit more under the supervision of a teacher, especially in a group class for pregnant women. The group dynamic supports every individual at a subtle level.
6. To reap the full benefit of yoga practices, awareness of body movements, sensations and breath is essential. The practice of Satyananda Yoga–Bihar Yoga helps to develop and fine-tune one’s awareness. One can discover many things about one’s body, mind and emotions and about the baby in the womb during the time of practice and throughout the day through this developed faculty of awareness. It helps establish a relationship with the baby so that mother and child are in harmony throughout the pregnancy, birthing process and after.
7. Relaxation is included periodically during a class or home practice to let the breath and heart-rate normalize and to allow the muscles to relax again after the activity. These periods of relaxation can be used to observe the effect of yoga on body, mind and emotions. You can also use this time to visualize the practices.
8. Internal awareness is always an important factor in any yoga practice but during pregnancy its importance increases manifold; it is comparatively easy to over-do the movements due to the increased laxity of muscles, ligaments and tendons at this time, and so it is advisable to do only simple practices during pregnancy. One should always be cautious, never strain and in case of pain or strong discomfort immediately stop the practice.
9. Some of the practices require adaptation to suit the pregnant woman and to make them safe for her. One should always respect the fact that the capacity and the needs of the body change temporarily during pregnancy and all activities must be adapted accordingly.

10. Strenuous practices, especially those accompanied by rise in intra-abdominal pressure and squatting postures, are best avoided in the first trimester of pregnancy because the embryo may not be firmly established in the uterus. Many practices are uncomfortable in advanced pregnancy due to the enlarged size of the uterus and should be avoided. Forward bending and prone postures are generally unsuitable during pregnancy.
11. Cleansing hatha yoga practices of kunjal kriya (with some exception), laghoo shankhaprakshalana and nauli are not recommended during pregnancy. Slow, gentle kapalbhati may be practised with caution. Jala neti and trataka are beneficial.
12. General guidelines regarding food, type of clothing, time and place of practice hold equally true for pregnant practitioners. There should be a gap of about four hours after major meals. A glass of water or a light drink like lemon and honey or coconut water is beneficial before a yoga class for pregnant women. A loose, comfortable, cotton outfit, like a t-shirt and trousers that allow the skin to breathe is ideal for yoga practice. Early morning before or at sunrise is the best time as the mind and body are rested and calm, the atmosphere is fresh and crisp, charged with prana, the cosmic energy, and the distractions of the external world are at a minimum. Alternatively evening time around sunset can be used. Usually non-working mothers find mid-morning best suited for yoga practice as the house is quiet at that time. The practices may be spaced throughout the day: mantras, asana and pranayama in the morning, yoga nidra in the afternoon and meditation either after pranayama in the morning, at bedtime or twice a day.

A clean, well-ventilated, draught-free area which is comfortably cool or warm is required. Avoid polluted air, air-conditioning and fans. A natural environment like a park, garden, roof-top or patio is ideal. A folded blanket of natural material, a cotton carpet (durrie) or a yoga

mat which does not slip can be used for the practice. It is a good idea to keep a few cushions nearby to support the posture. Breathe naturally and deeply unless instructed otherwise. If possible avoid disturbances like doorbells, phones or family members and children demanding attention. It is better to empty the bowel and bladder and take a shower before the practice. It is advisable to skip the practices in the case of severe constipation, fever or other signs of infection to minimize the chance of the disease spreading to other areas of the body. In case of injury and/or pain it is better to rest the affected area.

Mantra

The chanting of the mantra *Om* three times helps connect with and draw from the cosmic energy. This is followed by Shanti Path for fruitful learning. Then, 11 rounds of *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra for healing, energy, power, immunity and strength; the *Gayatri* mantra chanted eleven times for wisdom, inner clarity, intuitive knowledge and learning, and finally, the 32 names of Durga are chanted three times for overcoming distress in life.

The mantra chanting ends with wishing peace to all. This helps set the mood for the yoga practice. At the subconscious level the particular time is assigned for the yoga practices. If one feels mantras are too alien, then appropriate short prayers or positive affirmations can replace them. It is better to be consistent in the choice of mantra, prayer or affirmation and to have full faith in that choice

Shanti path

The mantras at the end are powerful prayers to help assimilate the positive energy generated by yoga sadhana in oneself and then share it with people known and unknown.

Relaxation to unwind

If the practitioner is spending some of her time in daily activities before the yoga session, then a relaxation practice of either shavasana, if necessary supported with a cushion, or matsya kridasana are helpful to unwind. The latter is preferable and more comfortable in the later stage of pregnancy. Palming and the practice of far-near gazing can be included if yoga is preceded by eye-straining work.

Lying on the side as in matsya kridasana is preferable to lying flat on the back as in shavasana, especially in the latter half of pregnancy. In shavasana the size of the uterus increases, its weight falls on the inferior vena cava, compressing this major vein draining the lower half of the body. The resultant fall in cardiac output can jeopardize foetal blood supply to some extent. If the mother wants to lie on the back, then a cushion under the right hip and waist can offset this effect. She should also take a thin pillow under the head up to the shoulders to support the curve of the cervical spine. While lying on the side a comfortable pillow to keep the head, neck and the spinal column in one straight line is required to avoid an undue upward or downward stretch on the cervical nerves. A cushion between the legs or under the upper knee may be required to accommodate the belly.

HATHA YOGA

Asana

The core of asana practice is meant for general wellbeing, for feeling light and energized, for suppleness, flexibility and improved circulation. A few asanas from the series of pawanmuktasana part 1, stretching and twisting asana like tadasana, tiryak tadasana, marjari asana and kati chakrasana or suptha udarakarshanasana, and a balancing asana like eka pada pranamasana is suggested. Other yogasanas that are specific to the needs of a pregnant woman need to be added to this core practice.

Yoga emphasizes correct breathing. The demand of oxygen is greater for the growing baby, yet the breath is shallow because the diaphragm does not have enough space to move down as the abdominal cavity is fully occupied by the growing foetus and uterus. Baddha hasta utthanasana and modified kandharasana can aid good breathing in the pregnant mother.

The state of pregnancy has a tendency to develop venous stagnation in the lower half of the body. Good circulation promotes oxygenation and nutrition to the baby, increased energy for the mother and relief in symptoms due to venous congestion like swelling of the feet and piles, haemorrhoids. Pawanmuktasana part 1 works like magic. Modified vipareeta karani asana and utthana pristhasana are other beneficial asanas.

There is a disproportionate weight gain in pregnancy. The increased weight sometimes causes lumbar lordosis, an exaggerated forward curve of the lower back. The enlargement of breasts may lead to rounding of shoulders and increased stress on the cervical vertebrae or the neck. The gait changes as footsteps are placed wider apart to maintain the centre of gravity. Asanas like vajrasana, pelvic rotation, dwikonasana, gomukhasana, akarna dhanurasana, kandharasana and modified vyaghrasana help to correct the posture and strengthen the postural muscles.

The muscles of the pelvic floor support the weight of the baby and at the time of birth allow the passage of the baby. They need to be strong yet at the same time supple and extendible. Practices like moola bandha, marjari asana, kandharasana and namaskarasana strengthen the pelvic floor while titili asana, matsya kridasana, marjari asana, utthan pristhasana and modified supta udarakarshanasana allow it to stretch and expand.

The muscles of the abdominal wall also need to be strong to support the weight of the baby, to maintain the uterus in place so it is well aligned with the birth canal to facilitate the mother's effort to deliver the baby during

labour. Padotthanasana and chakki chalanasana can serve this purpose.

The head-down position of the baby facilitates its passage during birth. In the earlier part of pregnancy the baby changes its position spontaneously but as it grows bigger it is not able to do so easily due to lack of adequate space. Kandharasana is the best position for turning the baby, marjari asana, matsya kridasana and utthan pristhasana can also help to improve the woman's posture and encourage the baby to turn into the head-down position.

Pranayama

Pre-pranayama and pranayama practices help to correct the breathing pattern, to energize and stimulate prana and make the mind calm, clear and attentive. They relieve stress and prepare the mind to turn inward for spiritual practices. Awareness of the natural breath, abdominal breathing, deep or full abdominal-thoracic breathing, nadi shodhana pranayama, bhramari pranayama, ujjayi and sheetali/sheetkari pranayama, mental alternate nostril breathing or inverted 'V' breathing are useful during pregnancy. Pranayamas may be practised with certain mudras for a deeper effect. Jnana, chin and nasagra mudra are common mudras for all. Yoni mudra and prana mudra have added advantage during pregnancy.

RAJA YOGA

Pratyahara and dharana

Practices of pratyahara and dharana sharpen the internal awareness regarding bodily functions, thoughts and feelings. They help to understand one's behaviour and relationship with other people. They also help to connect with and develop devotion to and faith in the cosmic self. In short, the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of the personality grow. Kaya sthairyam, mantra meditation, antar mouna,

ajapa japa or trataka can be practised. Those who are familiar with these practices can also practise chidakasha dharana and hridayakasha dharana. Practices of pratyahara and dharana are best done either in the morning after pranayama, at bedtime, or at both these times.

Yoga nidra

Yoga nidra is a pratyahara practice of deep relaxation. In a yoga class either yoga nidra or one meditation practice may be given. At home it is usually an independent practice in the late afternoon or evening. It is practised at bedtime if one has difficulty sleeping. Yoga nidra helps to relax physically, mentally and emotionally. It helps to bring about a feeling of calmness, happiness and a sense of fulfilment. At times it brings to the surface a deeply embedded, forgotten impression and releases it, thus healing deep-rooted emotional stress. It is healing and rejuvenating at all levels. Yoga nidra, along with other meditation practices gives the pregnant woman an opportunity to be fully aware of the internal changes taking place and time to connect with the new life growing within. It helps to form a strong bond with the unborn child.

Yoga nidra consists of eight stages: 1. preparation, 2. *sankalpa* or resolution, 3. rotation of awareness through the body parts, 4. awareness of breath, 5. mentally generating opposite sensory experiences., 6. visualization, 7. repeating the sankalpa and 8. ending the practice or externalization. The stages 1, 3, 4 and 8 are essential, others can be included as per need but always in the given order. The sankalpa helps to bring about positive changes in life through one's willpower. So why not make use of it at this special time?

KRIYA YOGA

Through the practices of kriya yoga one is able to connect with the *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic dimension. If the expectant mother is a regular practitioner of the kriyas, she may continue according to her capacity. Her own physical and mental wellbeing and that of the unborn child remain the priority and should never be ignored.

The practice of visualization, an integral part of the kriya yoga practices, can be developed by everyone. The mother may want to visualize her child, imagine activities she will want to do with her growing child or places she would like to take her child to.

General images of nature, such as flowers, trees, animals, beautiful sceneries, landscapes, oceans and ever-changing skies, there is no limit to the imagination and creation of positive imagery.

Visualization of yantras, one's personal symbol or a candle flame are equally beneficial as they connect us with a source of inspiration, solace and strength.

KARMA YOGA

Through karma yoga we can cultivate the qualities of non-attachment, we can find a healthy balance between self-effort, *purushartha*, and acceptance, and we can cultivate harmony, goodwill and joy in our actions and interactions. These qualities are important for everyone and the mother whose life will change with the birth of her child.

BHAKTI YOGA

Bhakti yoga practices like singing kirtan, japa, prayer, reading inspiring stories are equally powerful. Classical music, activity in creative art and contact with nature are

other examples that can provide this opportunity. Once the mother has connected with the baby in the womb, she may want to convey love, feelings, aspirations and dreams.

It will strengthen our emotions, make them balanced and sattwic. This will add more sweetness to interpersonal relationships and thereby create a happy, contented and peaceful society.

JNANA YOGA

Reviewing every day at night and making mental or real notes of any particular event helps to clear the mind before going to sleep. A spiritual diary is a means to keep track of whatever quality, behaviour or attitude one wishes to monitor and improve. The SWAN Principle and the practice of pratipaksha bhavana are further methods to increase sensitivity to one's being and enhance the quality of one's life.

All practices are described in detail in the appendices.

PRECAUTIONS

The practices listed in this book are generally safe for a pregnant woman.

- *Previous history of miscarriage, difficult conception and cervical incompetence:* Any undue exertion, rise in intra-abdominal pressure as in straining and squatting postures should be avoided during the first four months. Mantras, gentle asana like pawanmuktasana part 1, nadi shodhana pranayama, yoga nidra and meditation can be done.
- *Morning sickness:* A balanced yoga program and emotional support is adequate in most of the cases; kunjla kriya may be used only as a last resort.
- *Hypertension:* Avoid all strenuous practices and stimulating pranayamas.

- *Diabetes*: Strict dietary control is recommended along with yoga and walking.
- *Placenta previa or placenta in the lower segment*: Avoid all asanas except pawanmuktasana part 1 of ankle, toes, arms and neck. Avoid stimulating pranayamas.

GENERAL ADVICE

Good posture

A good posture is sitting tall with the spine upright, and spine, neck and head in alignment, with the chin very slightly down, shoulders relaxed, the head pulled up and a little towards the back, shoulders braced back and down, elbows by the side of the waist. There can be a slight forward tilt of the pelvis. It is a good idea to have a support for the lower back. A small cushion under the buttocks and under the knees is helpful when sitting cross-legged on the floor. While walking the feet are pointing forward and placed as close as comfortable.

As pregnancy progresses

After three to four months of pregnancy, dynamic and more challenging practices can be introduced as the foetus is by then firmly established in the uterus. Usually pregnant women enrol for classes only after the first trimester, especially if they are new to yoga. After preparatory practices for one month or so they can be given these asanas. The pregnant woman may feel excessive heat due to increased metabolic rate in the second half of pregnancy. Sheetali pranayama may help her stay cool. She may be now ready to increase her respiratory reserve by advancing in the practice of nadi shodhana pranayama. Ujjayi will train her to introvert and improve respiratory efficiency. In this phase meditation practices are of prime importance.

In the last six to eight weeks of pregnancy, the practices need to be toned down as they become physically inconvenient. The more dynamic asanas are replaced by gentler ones and that too with necessary adaptations. Ujjayi pranayama

has a calming effect, enhances breath awareness and increases the breathing capacity. Mantras and meditation practices can continue to the capacity of the practitioner.

Certain practices can be done throughout the pregnancy:

- Among asanas: pawanmuktasana part 1, marjari asana, kandharasana, gentle spinal twist, baddha hasta utthan-asana and matsya kridasana;
- Among pranayama practices: breath awareness, abdominal and thoracic breathing, bhramari pranayama, nadi shodhana pranayama ratio 1:1, sheetali pranayama and ujjayi pranayama.
- Further practices recommended are: moola bandha, yoga nidra, mantras, mantra meditation and ajapa japa.

Establishing contact

Yoga develops the faculty of awareness. It helps one know, understand and deal with what goes on inside the body and in the mind – its range of perception and deeper samskaras, manifesting in thinking, emotions, attitudes, speech and behaviour patterns. This awareness and the resultant understanding improve the quality of one's life. This is not the end. The aim is to establish contact with the inner self which is the source of life, happiness, light and everything that is good and benevolent. The yogic practices of pratyahara and dharana use breath, sound or mantra, vision or psychic symbol to introvert the awareness and tap this ever-present source.

The mother is able to create a beautiful environment for the baby to grow into a strong healthy being. It is also necessary that with the help of these practices she establishes a relationship with the baby and becomes more aware of the needs of the baby. She is able to offer the best support to the baby.

The baby is receptive to learning and that must be provided. Whatever habits and attitudes one wants to inculcate in the baby can be easily accomplished at this time. The mother can give good samskaras by living them herself and teaching them in these moments of connection.

11

Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate

The relationship of a child with its mother is not only intimate, but intense and natural, for the child is nurtured by the warmth drawn from the mother and maintained by the mother's milk in every respect. It is far easier, much more real, natural and practical to conceive of God as Mother.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Many changes occur in the woman's body during pregnancy. These changes are necessary to prepare for the new role of motherhood and to satisfy the needs, of the growing foetus and child who is dependent on the mother for its survival and development. These changes are responsible for some physical discomfort to the mother. We will try to understand how she can best deal with these changes with the help of yoga – how she can 'adapt, adjust, accommodate' to this unique time.

Backache

Many causes can be responsible for backache during pregnancy. One must either prevent or address each one of them.

The most common cause in later pregnancy is tiredness and fatigue of the paraspinal postural muscles due to

constant bearing of extra weight in the abdomen. Periodic rest and avoiding excess weight gain can help. Pelvic circular movements offer relief. Matsya kridasana is the most relaxing posture to rest in.

The postural change of exaggerated lumbar lordosis, pushing forward of the lower back, may be another cause. Awareness of posture, pelvic movements, modified kandharasana, lifting the buttocks and lower back only as far as comfortable, marjari asana and strengthening abdominal muscles with padotthanasana is helpful.

The increased demand for calcium can lead to various degrees of deficiency which in turn is responsible for the softening of bones and thus backache. Adequate dietary intake in the form of milk and regular supplements of minerals and vitamins during pregnancy and lactation is necessary. General yogasana or exercise like walking, especially in soft sunlight at the time of sunrise and sunset, helps in maintaining calcium in the mother's bones. Extremely flexible tissues can cause minor disturbance in the alignment of small joints of the vertebral column leading to improper posture or pressure on spinal nerves. Asanas like marjari asana, modified kandharasana, supta pawanmuktasana, tadasana, supta udarakarshanasana and matsya kridasana are helpful in re-establishing the correct alignment.

Sometimes the enlarged uterus presses on a spinal nerve causing sciatica-like pain, backache and/or pain radiating down the thighs and legs. A change of posture or rest in matsya kridasana may help. At times one just has to bear with the discomfort until the baby is born.

Fatigue

Pregnant women are easily tired. The increased metabolic rate, increased demand of oxygen, relatively shallow breathing and varicosity of leg veins contribute to fatigue.

Whatever is the cause of fatigue, pawanmuktasana part 1, asanas done with awareness and full possible range of movement produce relief by stretching the muscles

concerned and improving blood circulation to the affected area. Also beneficial are:

- Periodic rest and practice of yoga nidra
- Strengthening the postural muscles with kandharasana, marjari asana and utthan pristhasana
- Conscious, deep breathing and pranayama practices
- Modified vipareeta karani asana.

Sometimes the tiredness may be due to dehydration and electrolyte imbalance. Pregnant women tend to drink less to compensate for increased frequency of urine. As their metabolic rate is high, they feel hot and perspire more leading to dehydration and electrolyte imbalance. Therefore, it is recommended that frequent liquid intake is observed throughout the pregnancy.

Body ache and muscle cramps

The causes and remedies of body ache and muscle cramps are the same as for fatigue.

An additional cause may be low calcium level. During pregnancy calcium is actively transferred from the mother's bones to the foetus. During lactation also, there is a need for increased calcium, as the need of the growing baby is greater than that of the foetus. It takes a year or more to replenish the optimum calcium levels in the mother's body after she stops lactating. If she becomes pregnant again within that time then her body is already depleted and the muscle cramps and body ache may be more severe. Adequate intake of calcium rich foods (e.g. sesame seeds, nuts, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, any local equivalents) or supplement during pregnancy, lactation and beyond are essential for the health of the mother. Sour foods should be avoided.

Headache, water retention and swelling of the body

There is overall retention of water by the body during pregnancy under the effect of various hormones. This can lead to extra weight gain, puffiness of the face, swelling of body parts like feet, ankles and lower back, shortness

of breath due to waterlogging in the lungs. In the case of nasal congestion padadhirasana is a good practice. Other conditions are anaemia due to dilution of blood, headaches and mood changes due to water retention in the brain. Swelling can also lead to increased blood pressure.

Pawanmuktasana part 1, modified vipareeta karani asana, pada sanchalanasana, deep breathing and ujjayi pranayama are helpful in re-establishing water balance in the body. Walking is also a beneficial exercise. Long periods of standing or sitting on a chair should be avoided, and the mother should be as active as possible. Too much resting and a sedentary lifestyle will aggravate the problem. Extra salt and sour foods should be avoided.

Excessive weight gain

Excessive weight gain can be due to water retention, dietary imbalance, sedentary lifestyle or disturbed physiology like diabetes or hormonal imbalance.

Avoiding extra fat and carbohydrates in the diet combined with a physically active life can help reduce excessive weight gain. Pada utthanasana, chakki chalanasana and nauka sanchalanasana can provide adequate physical activity. Walking and swimming, if not otherwise contra-indicated, are good alternative or supportive activities.

Feeling hot

Pregnant women are generally less tolerant to heat due to the increase in their metabolic rate. Drinking a lot of water in small amounts to avoid acidity and the practice of sheetali/sheetkari pranayama is advised. Hot spices in food and synthetic clothing should be avoided. Sandalwood paste and mud packs are useful in the scorching heat of summer months.

Shortness of breath

There are multiple factors contributing to shortness of breath. Lack of adequate space for the diaphragm to move and hence for the lungs to expand is the most important

one. Compression in the abdomen due to improper posture and heaviness of breasts adds to the situation. Contributing factors to shortness of breath are: increased demand for oxygen due to the elevated basal metabolic rate, excessive weight gain and retention of water. Awareness of correct posture and proper breathing, which effectively helps manage the situation, can be developed with:

- tadasana
- baddha hasta utthanasana
- akarna dhanurasana
- tiryak tadasana
- conscious deep breathing
- nadi shodhana pranayama with internal retention for three seconds or so
- ujjayi pranayama.

The increased demand for oxygen can be managed by periodic short spells of rest, pacing the activities and improving breathing pattern with yoga practices.

If the shortness of breath due to water retention is bothersome at night, then the upper torso may be propped up to an angle of 30 to 45 degrees using pillows and other supports.

It is a good idea to report to the doctor and take medical advice, for any conditions that continue to cause undue discomfort or concern.

Morning sickness

Sipping liquids, sucking lemon and ice cubes, drinking herbal teas like lemongrass or mint are age-old remedies. Some aroma oils may be soothing. A balanced yoga program done regularly generally manages this discomfort well. Diverting the mind to an interesting activity is another alternative. It is best to bear with it as it usually occurs only in the first trimester. Kunjal kriya may be used as a last resort.

Indigestion, gas, acidity, heartburn

The digestive capacity is not optimal during pregnancy and hence the diet should be easily digestible and low in fat.

The total food intake should be divided into five to six small meals and the protein content carefully chosen. Certain protein-rich meals are heavy to digest and should be avoided totally. One should eat a meal that leaves the stomach about two hours after it has been taken. Sleeping within one hour after any meal and before two to three hours after the last meal at night should be avoided. A combination of asanas such as *tadasana*, *tiryak tadasana* and *kati chakrasana* and adequate physical activity such as regular walking help improve digestion.

Heartburn may occur in spite of good digestion. It is due to the stomach being compressed by the enlarged uterus pushing its contents up into the oesophagus. Small, easily digestible meals in liquid form may allow the contents of the stomach to pass quickly into the intestines. Avoid lying down when the stomach is feeling full. Try to maintain good posture, to increase the internal space. At bedtime sleep with the upper torso propped up by 30 to 45 degrees on pillows or with the head end of the bed elevated by six to ten inches.

Constipation and haemorrhoids

Under the relaxing effect of the reproductive hormone progesterone the peristaltic movements of the digestive tract become sluggish. The residual material of digested food stays longer in the colon, increasing water absorption and making the contents very dry. This factor, if combined with a low-fibre diet or low water intake will result in constipation. The enlarged uterus may press on the rectum adding to the problem.

- Ensure adequate roughage and water in the diet;
- Practise slow abdominal breathing with awareness;
- Practise *supta pawanmuktasana* with one leg at a time starting with the right leg, and the combination of *tadasana*, *tiryak tadasana* and *kati chakrasana* after drinking two glasses of plain water.
- Regularize the bowel habit and using *moola shodhana* or *ganesh kriya* to stimulate bowel movement.

- Piles may be secondary to constipation or caused independently due to varicosity of veins in the rectum. Usually this discomfort settles by itself after the birth of the baby. Utthan pristhasana and moola shodhana or ganesh kriya are especially effective in reducing varicosity in rectal veins.

Dizziness, sudden drop in blood pressure, high blood pressure

Sudden change of posture or lying flat on the back can precipitate a sudden drop of blood pressure and consequent dizziness. In a position like shavasana the weight of the enlarged uterus can compress the underlying inferior vena cava, the major vein draining de-oxygenated blood from the trunk and legs to the heart.

Sudden changes of posture should be avoided. When lying flat on the back a pillow can be kept under the right buttock and/or waist. Whenever a spell of dizziness is felt, lying in matsya kridasana, with a pillow supporting the upper leg, and breathing slowly and deeply will bring relief. If required drink plain water.

Some pregnant women develop a tendency to high blood pressure. Increased blood volume, water retention and increased activity of certain hormones like thyroid and adrenal hormones are responsible for this tendency.

Restriction of salt in the diet along with the practice of pawanmuktasana part 1, abdominal and yogic breathing, nadi shodhana pranayama, bhramari pranayama, ujjayi pranayama and yoga nidra can help to bring the blood pressure down to normal level. Chanting mantras and mantra meditation also have a great beneficial effect.

Varicose veins

The veins are dilated during pregnancy due to the relaxing effect of progesterone on the walls of veins. The dilated veins are full with blood. The enlarged uterus exerts pressure on the major vein that collects blood from the lower abdomen

and legs causing obstruction to the blood flow. These physiological conditions together produce varicosity and sluggish blood flow in leg veins.

Raising the legs at or above the heart level periodically as in padotthanasana, and modified vipareeta karani asana is helpful. Walking and pawanmuktasana part 1 also help as the active contraction and relaxation of leg muscles push the de-oxygenated venous blood towards the heart. Deep, slow breathing encourages venous blood to flow towards the heart by its suction effect.

Urinary stasis, urinary frequency, urinary tract infection

The enlarged uterus presses on the urethras producing obstruction to the flow of urine. The resulting urinary stasis can lead to urinary tract infection. The enlargement of the uterus leaves little space for the urinary bladder to fill to its capacity. As the uterus grows in size from being a pelvic organ to becoming an abdominal organ it stretches the urethra leading to a constant urge to urinate. This together with a smaller capacity of the urinary bladder to hold urine increases the frequency of urination.

It is best not to ignore the urge to urinate and to keep drinking plenty of water and liquids in spite of frequent urination. This will help to maintain the health of the urinary system. There are no specific yoga practices for urinary problems, however, general and regular yoga practice of ashwini/moola bandha, marjari asana, kandharasana, titali asana and others maintain a healthy urinary system. These discomforts are temporary and must be borne with patiently. They can increase after giving birth if the pelvic floor is compromised, cut or torn.

Sinus congestion

Generalized water retention and tissue oedema under the influence of various hormones may cause symptoms of sinus congestion and blocked nostrils. Padadhiraana is helpful to free blocked nostrils. The practice of jala neti is effective

in relieving the nasal congestion and can be done weekly or daily if required.

Mood changes

There are many reasons for mood swings, such as feeling dull, lethargic, restless, irritable. Unaccustomed hormonal changes and water retention may be the most common ones. And remember that your whole life is about to change!

A physically active life, regular yoga practice, being in inspiring company and reading uplifting literature can stabilize mood fluctuations. *Simhagarjanasana*, the roaring lion, is an effective asana in releasing suppressed emotions. Moola bandha and the dynamic yogasanas like nauka sanchalanasana and vyaghrasana can mobilize pranas and elevate a tamasic mood. When the mood changes are more intense and lasting as in depression, then along with the above measures professional help and guidance may be sought.

Fear

Concern or worry for the birth process and the wellbeing of the baby and self are most common and very natural emotions for any pregnant woman. When these concerns are out of proportion and long lasting they take on the form of fear.

Talking to experienced women, understanding pregnancy and the birth process by talking to medical and paramedical personnel goes a long way. Yoga nidra, soothing pranayamas and mantra chanting can help in relieving fears and anxieties. Simple grounding asanas like pawanmuktasana part 1, tadasana, eka pada pranamasana can change the state of emotions by diverting the awareness from an imaginary future to the present moment.

Breath awareness, mantra japa, kirtan and the practice of antar mouna may be used to manage moments of fear. Also with the practice of swadhyaya in regard to fear you may be able to find and analyze the source of the fear.

Above all connect to the yama of happiness, *manahprasad*, and to your own inner strength of faith and positivity.

DOs AND DON'Ts

Do	Don't
Replace any desire for distraction and evasion with positive input: inspiring music, books, talks or walks in nature.	Use of chemical substances like tobacco in any form including passive smoking, addictive drugs by any route of administration and alcohol in any dilution or quantity.
Consult your doctor.	Medical or alternative/ complementary drugs unless fully assured of its safety. Even when the safety is assured, its use should be minimized.
Live as naturally and healthily as possible.	Polluted environment, food and water.
Connect to the good and positive in you and in others.	Violent environment like arguments and fights in the family or surroundings, watching violence in films, reading such material or listening to such news.
Harmonious sexual activity which may help relax, strengthen the connection and closeness to the partner.	Unrestrained sexual activity.
Wear natural fibres.	Tight-fitting synthetic clothing.
Keep active without exerting yourself.	Sedentary life and sleeping during the day.
Eat natural, organic food.	Refined, preserved or fatty food.
Adjust diet.	Strong purgatives.

Do	Don't
Accept frequent urination and do not stop drinking plenty of water.	Holding the urge of urination or defecation.
Opt for walking, swimming, yogasana.	Strong jerky movements like riding a speedy vehicle, running, jumping, diving in water.
Use common sense.	Over-exhaustion with physical activity, carrying heavy loads.
Use for spiritual practice of japa, spiritual diary, reading chanting.	Sleepless nights.
Only if unavoidable.	Exposure to x-ray or other radiations.
Only if unavoidable.	Living in an isolated house alone.



12

The Time of Birth

When the time is right, the baby fully matured and ready to start his new life in an independent manner, then nature begins the process of birthing. Many women are afraid of the experience of this event, mostly due to inaccurate or exaggerated information. They do not have the tools of yoga to help them. They quickly opt for medical intervention. All major life changes can bring varying levels of fear. It is perfectly normal. It is true that there may be moments of pain but all precious things have their price.

Instead of succumbing to pain, being overwhelmed and drowned by it, you can choose to stay intensely aware of the internal movements of the baby, be with her, support her in her journey and thereby with your connection and love, override the pain. Use it to assist nature in bringing the baby into the world. Try to be supported and guided by trained people and people who love you and share with you this event.

The experience will add to your inner strength to deal with tough situations in life, yet when necessary for the safety of the baby and yourself there should be absolutely no hesitation to agree to medical intervention, be it minor or major.

The normal duration of pregnancy is considered to be 270 to 280 days from the day of conception. The period of childbirth is generally divided into three stages. In the first stage, the uterus begins contracting rhythmically, it is the opening or the gradual expansion of the cervix, and the baby

starts to descend. In the second stage, the cervix is fully open, the contractions of the uterus increase in strength and become more frequent and the delivery of the baby takes place.

In the third stage, the placenta or the 'after-birth' is expelled and the uterus contracts firmly and in a sustained manner.

If by any chance the medical team decides in favour of an intervention, accept it without any reservation and with full faith.

First stage of labour

This stage is marked by occasional gripping pain in the abdomen or dull pain in the lower back, pelvic discomfort due to the baby's head descending into the pelvis and at times by blood-stained or watery discharge from the vagina. At the time of pain the abdomen may feel hard due to the contraction of the uterus. This stage may last from a couple of hours to over 24 hours.

If the predicted due date is not close then try to delay the onset of labour by taking complete physical rest. Take your doctor's advice. Do not panic, let the mind stay relaxed, practise breath awareness of the natural breath, yoga nidra and mantra japa. Talk to your baby to stay on a little longer and not be in a hurry.

If the due date is close by and/or the pain becomes stronger and more frequent then prepare for going to hospital or contact the midwife if planning for home delivery. Stay mobile as much as possible with frequent rest in between. Do not tire yourself, conserve energy. Take nutritious, energy giving, easily digestible liquid diet. Avoid heavy meals. Try to stay calm and cheerful. Practise breath awareness of the natural breath, yoga nidra and mantra japa. Practise deep, slow abdominal breathing during each contraction. If possible sit in a reclined position at about 45 degrees rather than lying down. If comfortable, the legs may be semi-flexed at the hips and knees resembling titali asana, the butterfly position, and/or a squatting posture may be adopted for

short periods. This assists the downward passage of the baby and opens up the pelvis and perineum. You may feel a strong urge to pass stool or to bear down, but it is better not to do so during the first stage. It will tire you unnecessarily without any productive outcome. Maintain full awareness of the baby – connecting, supporting and loving.

Second stage of labour

This stage is marked by complete opening of the cervix. It lasts for 30 minutes to a few hours. Pain is experienced intensely and in quick succession. Now is the time for you to make maximum effort to help the baby in the birthing process. The doctor and the paramedical team will guide you accordingly.

With the start of every wave of pain you should inhale deeply, hold the breath as long as possible and at the same time bear down; and try to push the baby down and out. You can use mantra to time the breath-holding period and to provide a focus for the mind. Sometimes the pain may outlast the breath. In that case, you can breathe out and then quickly breathe in to continue again to synchronize the breathing with the pain. When the pain eases, you should breathe rapidly and deeply to replenish the body with plenty of oxygen and remove excess carbon dioxide.

You may sip high-energy lukewarm liquids if required. You should stay warm and try to maintain a squatting or semi-sitting posture for as long as possible as the force of gravity in this position greatly assists the baby. You may take up the conventional delivery posture when the baby's head is seen at the vaginal opening and the birth is imminent. The second stage ends with the birth of the baby.

Third stage of labour

The major work is over; the joy prevails with the birth of the child. It is a good idea to see, touch and be in close contact with the baby for some time as and when possible before he is taken out of the delivery room. If you so feel, you can chant a

mantra while touching the baby allowing your energy to flow freely from the heart. If exhausted then rest for some time quietly. The same breathing process as for birthing can be used to deliver the placenta or after-birth. Deep, abdominal breath followed by internal retention is helpful. At the end relax fully into natural sleep or yoga nidra.



13

After Childbirth

The strongest manifestation of God in this world is the woman as mother. She is the best of His beauty, the best representation of His benediction and grace.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The body of the mother undergoes physiological changes of great magnitude during pregnancy and childbirth. After the birth of the baby and placenta, there is a sudden change in the hormonal status. The woman's body begins the gradual process of returning to its pre-pregnancy state, except for the continual function of nourishing the baby through lactation. This phase of recovery is important for the mother's health must not be neglected. The mother is so busy caring for the baby and with her other domestic duties that she may forget to take care of herself. There are specific areas that need her attention and where yoga can be of help.

Rest and relaxation

Childbirth is an intense experience, physically, mentally and emotionally. The mother may feel exhausted or fatigued due to the muscular effort of bearing down, the associated pain lasting sometimes for many hours, restricted food or water intake and lack of sleep in the final stages of pregnancy and labour. For the first few days she should rest as much

as possible. Yoga nidra is of tremendous help as it provides relaxation and rest for the body and mind. Body massage by an experienced person is also of great value. A peaceful environment, soothing music and mantras can also help the new mother.

The mother's body loses a lot of blood and fluids during childbirth. There are many changes happening in the endocrine system and a new demand on the body for providing nourishment to the baby. Many times the baby does not allow adequate sleep at night to the mother.

Boosting the immune system

The major physiological changes during and after childbirth, along with general fatigue, temporarily weaken the immune system and predispose the mother to infections. Maintaining the optimum body temperature may be an issue. Good hygiene and adequate rest are of utmost importance. Visitors and socializing should not be over-done in the first two to four weeks. The mother should stay warm and eat well. Highly nutritious, easily digestible food and sufficient rest will help her regain strength and the ability to fight infection. In addition, she can resume a gentle yoga practice, which includes:

- pawanmuktasana part 1
- tadasana
- tiryak tadasana
- kati chakrasana
- bhramari pranayama
- full yogic breath.

She can start these practices gradually as soon as she feels comfortable enough. There should be no sense of compulsion to do so, no stress or any discomfort.

The immune system of the newborn is not yet developed. Good environmental hygiene, keeping warm and limited contact with the external environment are important factors for mother and child. Breastfeeding helps to protect and strengthen the immune system of mother and child. Mother's milk provides many ready-made antibodies to the baby.

Breastfeeding also prevents infections and upsets in the digestive system of the baby which can occur when using bottles. Breastfeeding can be an opportunity for the mother to rest and to connect physically and emotionally with her baby. It has a positive effect on the changing hormones and speeds up recovery time for the mother. There is less chance of an unhealthy weight gain for mother. Breast feeding helps to tone the mother's muscles and organs.

Toning the tissues

During pregnancy the uterus and other internal organs enlarge and many muscles are stretched and lose their elasticity. They need to be toned to their original size and strength. Time and the natural healing process help, and yoga can be a great asset at this time. Nature does assist but not completely; with yoga the process can become perfect. The yoga practices should not be started before three to four weeks after normal delivery and six to eight weeks after C-section. The mother should start with simple practices and a small number of rounds and gradually increase each practice session by adding more dynamic practices and/or increasing the number of rounds. To tone the abdominal organs and abdominal muscles the following asanas are useful:

- padotthanasana
- pada chakrasana
- pada sanchalanasana
- suptha pawanmuktasana
- marjari asana
- vyaghrasana
- chakki chalanasana
- nauka sanchalanasana
- naukasana.

The following practices are important for strengthening the muscles of the perineum and the reproductive organs and can be started any time after childbirth with care and awareness:

- moola bandha
- sahajoli mudra
- ashwini mudra.

They can be incorporated with the practices of:

- marjari asana
- kandharasana
- vipareeta karani asana
- vyaghrasana.

The following asanas are helpful in realigning the reproductive organs, especially the uterus and can be gradually added along with the asanas for strengthening the abdomen:

- shashankasana
- yogamudrasana
- supta vajrasana
- matsyasana
- utthan pristhasana
- ardha matsyendrasana
- parvatasana
- vipareeta karani asana.

Regaining overall strength

Most new mothers find that their lower back has become weak and their posture compromised. They need to strengthen not only the back muscles but also the deeper muscles of the abdomen that support the spine from the front, the thigh muscles and shoulders. These backward bending asanas strengthen the back muscles:

- bhujangasana
- ardha shalabhasana
- shashank bhujangasana
- sarpasana.

These asanas strengthen the spine from the front:

- gatyatmak paschimottanasana
- druta halasana
- dwikonasana
- kandharasana
- santolanasana.

This group strengthens the thigh muscles in addition to the deeper abdominal muscles:

- utthanasana
- natarajasana
- eka padasana.

To strengthen shoulder and arm muscles one should practise:

- shashank bhujangasana
- santolanasana
- sarpasana
- dwikonasana.

Surya namaskara is a strengthening practice that has beneficial effects on all areas of the body.

Breastfeeding

Lactation is a divine gift bestowed on every mother. At the physical level the mother needs to be attentive to the health and hygiene of breasts and nipples and make sure her own nutritional intake is adequate, especially in protein, calcium, iron and other minerals and vitamins. At the psychological level breastfeeding is a means to connect to and establish a strong bond with the baby.

At the spiritual level the pranic energy spontaneously and effortlessly rises to anahata chakra. This time should be filled with positive, divine thoughts and emotions. It helps to raise the mother's consciousness and through the milk the positive energy is passed on to the baby. If the mother's thoughts and emotions are negative, these samskaras may be passed on to the baby at a subtle level. It is therefore essential that just before feeding the baby the mother relaxes for a short time, for a few breaths, watches her thoughts and emotions and tries to usher in positive and divine ones. Then she takes the awareness to the heart centre with hridaya mudra, chants mantras or says a prayer, thinks of her source of inspiration, her *ishtha devata*, and then takes the baby for feeding.

If the child is not breastfed this ritual should be observed and a regular pattern should be set for the feeding time. Even

for adults mealtimes are important. Hence the environment and the mental states of mother and child must be sanctified for the best result. As the newborn baby has no mental diversions, its whole consciousness is fully occupied with the act of feeding; he is an extremely sensitive recipient of his environment.

Sexual life

Preferably the sexual activity of the mother should not start before three to five months after childbirth. This allows adequate time for the healing and recovery of the reproductive organs and minimizes the risk of infection.

Here is an ancient Indian view on sexual life to convey the concern for the mother's health. It shows that thought was given on how to enhance the woman's wellbeing, that of the family and community and how to improve the quality of our children. The recommendations therefore should not be seen as a moralistic sermon but as sound advice given to the individual and society with the intention to safeguard positive physical, mental and spiritual samskaras for future generations. In today's world we may take it as an outdated viewpoint or we may choose to adapt the wisdom of our ancestors into our lives.

It must always be remembered that sexual activity is not only for pleasure but for fulfilling the duty of continuing the family, its lineage and traditions.

- Total restraint during the entire period of pregnancy.
- Total restraint during the first five months of the post-natal period to allow the mother's reproductive system to regain strength.
- Avoid next pregnancy by total restraint or any other means so that the mother's body can rest and recover. Mother's body is depleted of nutrients during pregnancy and breastfeeding and needs to be replenished.
- Avoid next pregnancy by total restraint or any other means for another one year and six months (after

the mother's body has recovered) to prepare the mother's body for a strong and long-living progeny. This allows the mother's body to store excess nutrients in preparation for the next conception.

Kalyan – Nari, Issue, Year 22,
Time gap between two deliveries, p. 249

Mental health

The hormonal upheaval and the intense experience of childbirth can stir up deep samskaras and may precipitate mental imbalance just after childbirth. Demands of mothering a newborn may prove stressful to some women. Pregnancy and childbirth are sensitive times in a woman's life where she needs support from her partner and other family members. Regular yoga practices in the pre-natal and post-natal period help to maintain good mental health and keep her energetic and in a pleasant mood. If mental imbalance continues for two to four weeks in spite of these supportive measures, then it is good to ask for guidance and help.

Women feeling depressed, in a low mood or lethargic may choose from energizing practices like:

- pawanmuktasana part 2,
- shashank bhujangasana
- surya namaskara
- vipareeta karani asana
- agnisara kriya
- yogic breathing
- kapalbhati pranayama
- bhastrika pranayama
- kunjla kriya
- moola bandha
- maha bandha.

Women who feel angry or under stress may choose practices from this group:

- pawanmuktasana part 1
- tadasana

- tiryak tadasana
- kati chakrasana
- shashankasana
- slow surya namaskara
- breath awareness
- abdominal breathing
- nadi shodhana pranayama
- bhramari pranayama
- ujjayi pranayama
- jala neti
- laghoo shankhaprakshalana
- kunjala kriya
- yoga nidra
- mantra chanting
- ajapa japa.

A positive outlook and attitude can be developed through reading inspiring books, through satsang and keeping good company.

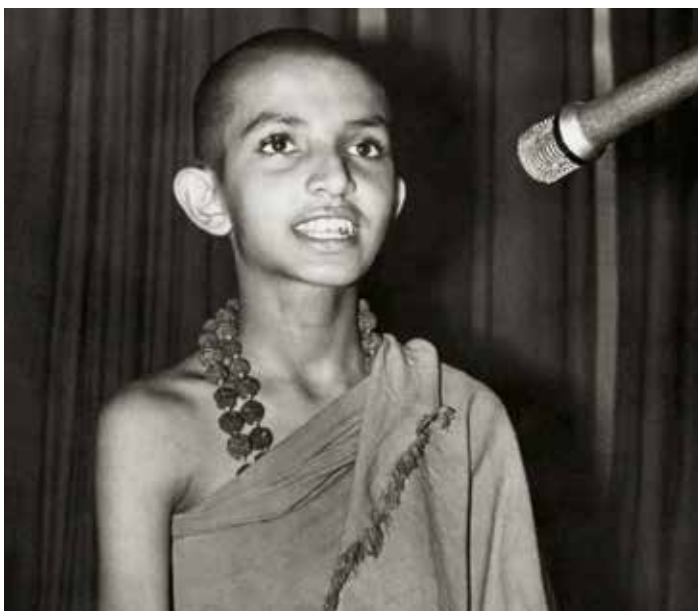
Establishing rapport

It is important that the mother establishes a rapport with her baby by close body contact, by talking to her, expressing her love and concern for and including the little being in all her activities. Let the child feel that she is an inseparable and most precious part of her existence and family. This allows her to grow into a strong, secure person with healthy self-esteem.

The biorhythm of the newborn is different from that of the adult. The mother has to adapt to his biorhythm for the first few months and then slowly encourage him to follow the solar rhythm of day and night. For the mother yoga nidra is a helpful tool to make up for the lost hours of sleep and resting time and cope with the physiological stress produced by the disturbed pattern.

Include the baby in yoga practices, while chanting mantras or saying prayers, doing *pooja*, worship, and any other spiritual practices. From the conception to the age of

seven years the consciousness of the child imbibes everything that she is exposed to. The parents and the family should use all opportunities available to imprint good samskaras on their children.



Yoga teaches us to come out of the personal shell. Before a seed can sprout, it has to die. Only when the shell of the seed is broken will the sprout be seen. In the same manner, yoga helps us to break the shell of selfishness and egocentricity in order to allow spiritual sprouting to take place where there is beauty, calmness and peace. This is what we look for in our life in today's society.

Through the various practices of yoga, we can find the way within ourselves, and thereby accelerate the pace of spiritual evolution – inner evolution. This inner evolution will ultimately bring us closer to the whole of humanity, creation and the universe.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Appendices

Hatha Yoga

The main objective of hatha yoga is to create an absolute balance of the interacting activities and processes of the physical body, mind and energy.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

For all practices of *yogasana*, *pranayama* and *mudras* refer to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, and seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Contra-indications, special precautions and specific modification have to be given by an experienced teacher. The instructions regarding the use of pillows, when to use a wall as support or how to modify certain postures must be followed. For this reason, no specific *sadhana* has been proposed, as the mother is encouraged to develop and fine-tune the awareness of her needs and those of the growing child. The safety and wellbeing of mother and child must be her prime concern and the practices must be done with that aim and purpose only.

Shatkarmas

- Neti
- Kunjal, recommended only as an exception and under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher
- Laghoo shankhaprakshalana, not recommended during pregnancy, but can be beneficial a few weeks after delivery.

Asana

- Akarna dhanurasana
- Chakki chalanasana, only after delivery: This asana strengthens the muscles of abdomen, pelvis, lower back, arms, shoulders and neck. It gently massages abdominal and pelvic organs and enhances their functions. It is good for women with poor digestion, constipation, excess wind or gas, lack of appetite, diabetes and obesity. It is a very good practice for post-natal recovery of muscle strength and tone.
- Dwikonasana
- Eka pada pranamasana: During pregnancy the centre of gravity shifts to allow for the growing child within. Sometimes you may feel a little less than graceful and poised but balancing poses can help you regain this. You may find it easier to stand near a chair or wall to begin with and allow the fingertips to touch the wall for added support.
- Gomukhasana
- Kandharasana (modified): This pose helps to strengthen the legs and lower back, relieves pelvic congestion, provides a gentle backward bend and may give an opportunity for your baby to naturally reverse a breech presentation. It strengthens the muscles of pelvic diaphragm as moola bandha spontaneously happens.
- Kati chakrasana
- Marjari asana: This posture and its variations are some of the most valuable movements you can do whilst pregnant. Being on all fours takes the weight off your spine and thus helps to relieve many forms of backache common

during pregnancy. Spending time each day exploring these movements also encourages the baby to move into an anterior position and for this reason it is a helpful position to move into during labour. It is also one of the few positions in which you can enjoy a gentle backward bend. The movements are sensuous like a cat stretching and help you to become more in touch with the mobility of the pelvis. The baby can also enjoy a gentle massage!

As your pregnancy develops do not allow the spine to completely relax downwards in this asana. The weight of the baby would put too much strain on the spine and ligaments, which are already becoming looser during pregnancy and may become overstretched. Instead come to a flat back and focus on the rounding of the back during exhalation. Listen to your own body and use the movements according to your capacity.

- Matsya kridasana: This pose can help relieve lower back discomfort as it takes the weight off your spine. It is a very safe relaxing posture as no pressure is exerted on the inferior vena cava. It is very soothing and reassuring posture as the whole spine is relaxed into 'C' shaped curve resembling foetal life. As the postural muscles of the back are stretched and relaxed the stress stored in form of increased muscle tone gets resolved leading to destressing effect on mind.
- Padadhirasana
- Parvatasana
- Pawanmuktasana part 1
- Rajju karshanasana
- Shashankasana: You will need one or two cushions available to make this pose as comfortable as possible. If you have high blood pressure, make sure that the head is not lower than the heart. Use extra cushions if you need to support either the belly or the head.

Separate your knees so that there will be plenty of room for your abdomen.

Make any small adjustments to be comfortable.

Remain in the position for as long as you are comfortable. Breathe naturally and be aware of the movement of your abdomen as you breathe. To maintain focused awareness whilst you relax in this pose count the breath backwards from 50. Those with sinus congestion may find this pose uncomfortable. The practice of neti (nasal douche) can relieve sinus congestion. As an alternative relaxation pose you can practise matsya kridasana.

It is a wonderful position to use as often as you like during pregnancy. It helps to induce relaxation, release tension from the back and regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands. Regular practice will also encourage the baby to move into an anterior position.

- Shavasana
- Supta udarakarshanasana: This practice gives a gentle twist and stretch through the hips, lower back and neck. It may help ease some lower back discomfort. The area of maximum twist may be manipulated (moved up or down) by changing the distance between feet and buttocks. This movement helps to release congestion in the pelvic area and stretches the sacral area of the back.
- Surya namaskara
- Tadasana
- Tiriyak tadasana
- Titali asana
- Trikonasana
- Utthanasana
- Utthan pristhasana: People with high blood pressure, tendency towards heartburn and shortness of breath may find this pose uncomfortable and should refrain from it. This asana provides a wonderful stretch for the upper back and shoulders and releases tension in the lower back. It offers partly inverted pose relieving pelvic congestion and piles. It relaxes muscles of the pelvic diaphragm and all the sphincters situated on the perineum. Like in marjari asana the weight of abdominal organs is taken off the vertebral column providing relief from backache.

It offers opportunity to the foetus to assume optimal position.

- **Vajrasana:** Those with varicose veins may find this pose unsuitable because it places pressure on the legs and vulval area. Try using a kneeling stool as an alternative. The excessive flexion of knees in this practice may get exaggerated in advanced pregnancy due to increased weight in the abdominal area. It is more comfortable if a cushion is placed between the calves and the thighs or a kneeling stool is used. Women with knee problems should not attempt this practice without kneeling stool. As the pregnancy advances and the baby grows bigger, breathing and digestion become a little more difficult for the expectant mother due to lack of adequate space. Sitting in this position or using a kneeling stool relieves pressure on the diaphragm as the spine becomes more erect and stretched. The asana prevents venous pooling in legs sparing extra blood for digestive system. It also re-directs the prana to the digestive system thus facilitating digestive function.

Try sitting in this pose for 10 minutes after you have eaten to ease indigestion or heartburn. This is also an excellent position to use for breathing practices and meditation.

- **Vipareeta karani asana (modified):** Lie down on your back near a bare wall with your feet close to the buttocks. Raise one leg and rest the heel on the wall. Raise the other leg and place the heel on the wall comfortably close to the first one. Slide your buttocks closer to the wall. Place a cushion under the head and one under the buttocks and lower back if needed. Relax completely. Alternatively place the legs on a sofa or chair; the body is lying on the floor, thighs are perpendicular to the ground and calves are on the seat of the chair. Stay for a few minutes or as long as comfortable. This pose can be practiced 2 to 3 times during the day whenever legs and lower back feel fatigued.

Swelling over ankles, varicose veins and ache and fatigue in legs are common during pregnancy. Resting with legs raised can be very relaxing and helpful. It assists stagnant venous blood in legs in returning to the heart making room for fresh blood to flow in. Improved venous return indirectly improves overall circulation by enhancing the contracting ability of the heart. In later pregnancy this posture may be less comfortable.

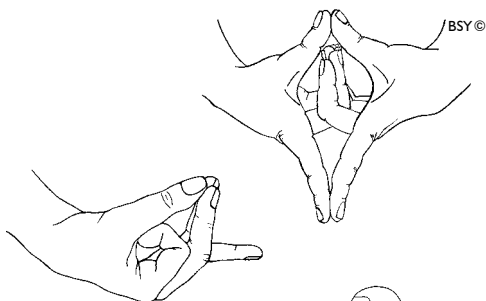
Pranayama

- Abdominal breathing
- Yogic breathing: As compared to abdominal breathing, yogic breathing needs more effort and is more energizing. All the areas of the lungs are well expanded and body oxygenation is better. The deep inhalation creates a sustained negative pressure in the chest cavity. This encourages impure blood to return to the heart and thus improves cardiac pumping action. However, it cannot be sustained throughout the day. In pregnancy this practice is very helpful as normally the diaphragm is pushed up by the expanding uterus causing shortness of breath. It, along with the panting breath, is very useful during labour.
- Bhramari pranayama: This is a great practice to relieve anxiety and tension. Some women also find this to be a useful way of managing anxiety and discomfort during labour.
During labour the practice can be simplified by not blocking the ears – simply enjoy the low toned humming on each outgoing breath.
- Nadi shodhana pranayama
- Sheetal pranayama
- Sheetkari pranayama
- Ujjayi pranayama: By gently constricting the glottis at the back of the throat it is possible to slow the rate of breathing considerably and thereby activate the natural relaxation response (the parasympathetic aspect of

the autonomic nervous system). This allows elevated pulse-rate and blood pressure to settle down at normal level. It creates positive air pressure in the respiratory system which improves the efficiency of the process of oxygenation. The practice is especially valuable during pregnancy and can be a very useful way of maintaining inner stability during labour.

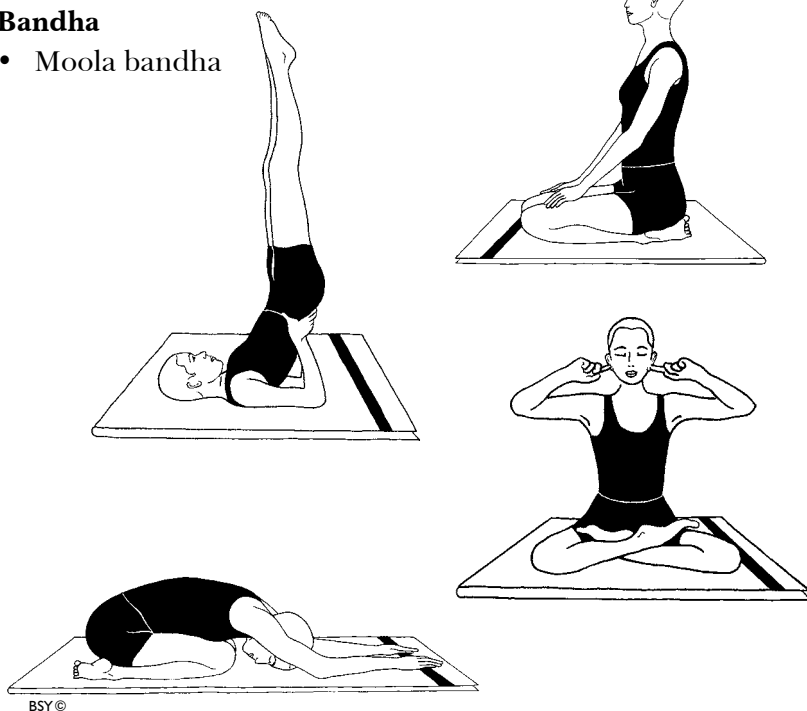
Mudra

- Ashwini mudra
- Chin mudra
- Hridaya mudra
- Jnana mudra
- Prana mudra
- Sahajoli mudra
- Yoni mudra



Bandha

- Moola bandha



Appendix 2

Raja Yoga

Self-acceptance and understanding of one's dharma are two initial steps of raja yoga.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

YOGA NIDRA

Yoga nidra sankalpa and images for adolescents

Sankalpa: Make a resolution which will motivate and encourage you to attain your goals. It may refer to your achievements at school, your place among your peers and in the family. Here are some examples:

I will study regularly and achieve my target.

I will be sincere and committed in my studies.

I will study with interest and joy.

I am a good friend to my peers.

I choose friends who will encourage me to live in a positive manner.

I respect my parents and am grateful for their support and love.

I am a responsible and a caring member of my family.

Images: Choose images and visualizations that inspire you and give you peace and contentment.

See yourself receiving the results you wish to attain.
See yourself among friends and participating in activities with them.
See yourself with the other family members, how you support each other, enjoy each other's company.
Visualize your family at mealtimes together, participating in activities together.
Beautiful, soothing images of nature.

Yoga nidra sankalpa and images for expectant mothers

Sankalpa: Make a resolution which will encourage you to live your pregnancy the way you wish to.

I enjoy every moment of my pregnancy.

I am positive and happy throughout my pregnancy.

I live to the best of my ability for the wellbeing of my child.

I prepare for a smooth delivery of my child.

I am ready to accept help in any way required.

Images: Choose images and visualizations that give you comfort and strength.

Visualize various stages of your pregnancy.

Visualize yourself giving birth.

See yourself with your child.

Visualize the new member of the family among the siblings.

Visualize the changes which will occur after the child is born.

Beautiful, soothing images of nature.



Yoga nidra means psychic sleep. It is a state of sleepless sleep where one is on the borderline between sleep and wakefulness. It is a state of inner awareness and contact with the subconscious and higher consciousness. A speaker or narrator is needed in the initial stages of practice. For this reason, it is a good idea, if possible, to put the directions on tape. Later on you will remember the instructions and you can practise alone.

Practise yoga nidra lying down with the head flat on the floor, in shavasana. The body should be straight and the head in line, legs slightly apart and arms close to but not touching the body, palms upwards. Lie completely still; the body must be totally relaxed with the clothes loose. There should be no physical movement once yoga nidra has begun. The stomach must not be full and the eyes must remain closed throughout.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

TECHNIQUE

Preparation

Kindly close your eyes and make yourself physically comfortable. You can readjust your physical position for some time if you like. Do not open your eyes until the whole practice is over. Try to follow the instructions mentally and not physically. Make yourself free from intellectual analysis and understanding. You have to follow the instructions automatically. There will be physical, mental and psychic relaxation. You have to keep awake throughout. Do not sleep.

Do not begin your practice all of a sudden, but develop the consciousness in your mind in this way, 'Now I am going to practise yoga nidra. In this practice of yoga nidra I shall remain awake all throughout.' And develop in your mind the experience which you have had at night when you go to bed completely relaxed and repeat

to yourself mentally, 'My mind is free, my body is free. I am preparing for relaxation. I am listening to the instructions.'

Now develop the awareness of your physical body right from the top to the toes and say in your mind *Ommm*.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Complete awareness of the whole body.

Resolve

You have to decide upon a resolve. You have to discover a resolve. You have to fix a resolve for yourself. Do not be in a hurry to make a resolution for yourself.

The resolve will have to be simple. Simple resolve, simple resolve, simple resolve. The resolve that you make during the practice of yoga nidra will come true.

The resolve should be clear, direct and short.

During this practice the resolve has to be repeated twice, once at the beginning of yoga nidra and once at the end.

The resolve that you make during yoga nidra is bound to happen in your life.

It is bound to fructify without any doubt.

If you can convince your mind, you can do anything.

After you have made your resolve you should again switch to the awareness of the physical body, and the whole body right from the top to the toes. Think of the whole body at one time, in one glance, in one thought. Think of the whole body in one thought. Develop whole body awareness at one moment.

'I am aware of my body, I am aware of my body'. This way you think, mentally, and go on developing awareness of the whole body.

Then again think, 'I am listening to the instructions, I am not sleeping, I am not drowsy, I am not conscious of external sounds, but I am relaxed and I can fall asleep at any moment and I have to be awake'.

Rotation of consciousness

Rotation of consciousness through different parts of the body. Repeat the name of the particular part in your mind and try to develop awareness of that part of the body just for a moment, not for a very long time. For instance, if I say 'right hand thumb', you have to say in your mind 'right hand thumb' without moving it, and then go on to the next. I will lead your consciousness to different parts of the body and the speed will be quite fast. Keep yourself alert, do not concentrate too intensely, just develop the awareness and try to move your mind as quickly as possible and as quickly as you are instructed. If at any time you are unable to keep up with the speed it does not matter, go ahead to the next. Please understand that you will have to say the name of the particular organ mentally.

Right side: Say mentally: right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, right toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Left side: To the left. Left thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, left toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Right side: Right again, from up to down. Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, right toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Left side: Go to the left from the top. Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, left toes, one, two, three, four, five.

Whole back: Go to the back side, go to the back side. Take your mind to the back of the head which is touching the ground; the back side of the head, the back side of the head which is touching the ground. Right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, spinal cord, right hip, left

hip, right buttock, left buttock, right side underneath the thigh, left side underneath the thigh, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, right ankle, left ankle, right heel, left heel.

Whole front: Go to the front at the top of your head, to the top of your head, the crown, the top of the head, the crown, the crown, the forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, centre of the eyebrows, right eye, left eye, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, right ear, left ear, upper lip, lower lip, chin, throat, right side of chest, left side of chest, the whole chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right abdomen, left abdomen, right pelvis, left pelvis, right side of groin, left side of groin, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right toes, left toes.

Major parts: Now the major parts of your body. The right leg, the left leg, both legs together. Right arm, left arm, both together. The whole of your back, the whole of your front, the head, the whole body. Visualize the whole body, say 'whole body' and visualize the whole body. Say 'whole body' and visualize the whole body. Intensify your awareness. The whole body, the whole body, the whole body, the whole body.

Breathing

Become aware of your breathing. Start to practise psychic nadi shodhana. With the count of five in each nostril and then in both nostrils together. Inhale to the count of five through the left nostril, exhale to the count of five through the right nostril; inhale through the right nostril to the count of five and exhale through the left nostril to the count of five. This is one round. Do five rounds. Then bring the awareness to both nostrils and to the count of five inhale through both nostril and exhale to the count of five through both nostrils. This is one round. Practise five rounds and then continue with the alternate breathing pattern. You are not using your fingers in the mudra to direct the flow of your breath. It is just through

your awareness that you follow the breath. Continue with intense awareness for about two minutes. (*Pause*)

Rapid images

Now become aware of these images as I name them . . . candle flame, candle flame, candle flame, white rose, white rose, white rose, yellow flower, yellow flower, yellow flower, waterfall, waterfall, waterfall, a big mango tree, a big mango tree, a big mango tree, a tall palm tree, a tall palm tree, a tall palm tree, apple tree laden with fruit, apple tree laden with fruit, apple tree laden with fruit, pink clouds, pink clouds, pink clouds, white clouds, white clouds, white clouds, blue clouds, blue clouds, blue clouds, a starry night, a starry night, a starry night, full moon, full moon, full moon, a horse racing, a horse racing, a horse racing, an elephant moving, an elephant moving, an elephant moving, the sun rising, the sun rising, the sun rising, the sun setting, the sun setting, the sun setting, waves of the ocean, waves of the ocean, waves of the ocean, sandy beach, sandy beach, sandy beach.

Resolve

Now again you will have to practise the resolve and repeat the resolve; make the resolve and repeat the resolve, one and the same resolve, do not change it, the same resolve. Your subconscious is exposed to the resolve now.

Ending the practice

Now become aware of the surroundings, any sounds you can hear. Be aware that you have been practising yoga nidra, the psychic relaxation practice. Be aware of you your body and contact points between your body and the floor. Feel the breath moving in the body. Check that you are awake. Keeping the eyes closed, make physical movements of the body, and prepare yourself to get up. Keep the eyes closed, but make movements with the body. Prepare yourself to get up. Now get up and open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

ANTAR MOUNA

Antar means ‘inner’, *mouna* means ‘silence’. It is a practice of sense withdrawal or *pratyahara*, the fifth stage of Sage Patanjali’s raja yoga. The individual awareness is cut off from the sense perceptions, the mind is drawn within, one becomes aware of inner phenomena and is able to enter into deep meditation. The full practice is divided into six stages. For the purpose of the yoga lifestyle sadhana, only the first stage is necessary

TECHNIQUE

Stage I: Awareness of sense perceptions

Sit in a meditative posture with eyes closed.

Relax the body and mind from all tensions.

Forget all worries, engagements, worldly affairs and relationships.

Be aware of all outer happenings.

Now become aware of the breath going out and coming in; long or short breath, comfortable breath. Breathe with relaxation.

Then become aware of the outer surroundings. Listen to the sounds such as birds, wind, people walking, cars, somebody talking, voices. Be aware of all sounds coming within the range of your perception.

Use the senses to connect with the external environment. After listening to the sounds for some time, become aware of other sense experiences: smells, the touch of clothing on the body, the touch of air on the bare skin. Become aware of the tastes in the mouth. Explore all the senses and sense objects. Feel fully connected to your body and the surroundings.

Relaxation and alertness will become deeper and deeper. End the practice by reconnecting to the natural flow of your breath and your physical posture.

Hari Om Tat Sat

AJAPA JAPA

Of all the systems of yoga used to induce pratyahara and intended to lead eventually to samadhi, japa yoga is the easiest and safest and can be practised by anyone at any time and under any conditions. The word *japa* itself means 'to rotate'. Japa yoga means union of the self with the highest existence through the rotation of consciousness. A mantra is the first requirement for japa yoga. A mantra is a grouping of sound vibrations which have an effect on the mental and psychic consciousness of man. Tradition says it is best if it is given by a guru or in a dream. An important point is that the mind should be fully impressed by this mantra. The mantra *Om* is a universal mantra and can be used by anyone.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

TECHNIQUE

Stage I: Preparation

Sit in padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana or sukhasana.

In this session we will take up the important subject of ajapa japa.

The word *japa* means repetition.

Ajapa japa means repetition without forced concentration, or spontaneous repetition.

There are different techniques used to keep the inner mind in touch with the mantra, whether it is the mantra *Om* or the mantra *So Ham*.

We will use the mantra *So Ham*.

Sah means He, the Supreme; *aham* means I, the individual soul. It is to remind yourself that 'I am That'.

The mantra is also the inherent sound of the breath itself; *So* is the ingoing breath and *Ham* is the outgoing breath. The first stage needs attention.

Become aware of your breath and become aware that you have not been aware of your breath for some time.

You have not been aware of it all night.

Your centre of awareness is in the throat, the frontal counterpart to vishuddhi chakra, *vishuddhi kshetram*.

The breath should be normal but not nasal; it should be from the epiglottis as it is naturally at night when you are sleeping, almost like snoring.

There should be little sound; the breath is subtle.

Close your eyes and stop all physical movement.

Become aware of the whole body.

If you maintain awareness of the whole body it will become quiet.

Concentrate or become aware of the throat, the frontal counterpart to vishuddhi.

You can feel your breath, which is not gross enough to hear.

Let the breath adjust itself and move spontaneously.

Maintain awareness of your breath.

The throat must become part of your constant awareness.

The feeling of the breath in the throat is the object of attention.

You have one idea . . . 'I know I am breathing in; I know I am breathing out.'

Each round of breathing should be the object of your awareness.

Do not try to go in.

If your mind wanders, let it but be aware of it.

Remember, 'I know I am breathing in; I know I am breathing out.'

The centre of awareness is vishuddhi.

Stage 2: Breathing in the frontal passage

Now to be more clear, instead of the suggestion, 'I am breathing in, I am breathing out,' suggest to yourself, 'I feel the breath ascending and descending, I know it is moving between throat and navel.'

No blank mind, keep the mind moving externally.

Awareness of the ascending and descending breath and awareness of 'I know'.

You are aware that you are aware of the breath.

The second stage of this practice is awareness of the ascending and descending breath.

No shaking or jerking, do not lose track.

Super awareness of awareness.

Keep your body stiff mentally.

With an expanded mind as if you are fully awake.

You know you are aware.

In the depths of meditation and concentration there is awareness.

'Yes, I am sure I am not sleeping, I am in a state of wakefulness.'

Ascending and descending breath, between the navel, manipura kshetram, and the throat, vishuddhi kshetram.

Between these two points there is no loss of consciousness even for one second.

Awareness of the breath ascending and descending.

Awareness of the ascending breath from the navel and descending breath from the throat.

The track and the way is the psychic way.

The path is for the psyche.

Keep awake, like a constant unfluctuating flame in a windless place.

Awareness of the psychic breath ascending and descending.

Practise and listen at the same time. This is important.

Stage 3: Awareness of So Ham

This is the third stage.

Moving your psychic breath awareness between the navel and the throat.

The path is the psychic path.

You know you are aware of the ascending and descending movement.

If you do it correctly for five minutes, the body is controlled by willpower, awareness is internalized, with

alertness, as if you are counting coins, or driving a car through heavy traffic.

Be aware of the movements of your consciousness.

If you understand me, you are developing a deeper awareness of your personality.

You are a seer of awareness.

Become still, motionless like a statue, like a stone that does not move.

This idea of a psychic path between the navel and the throat must become very clear.

More than that, it is important to know that you are aware of it.

In this ascending and descending process you have to develop awareness of the sound *So Ham*.

The ascending sound is *So*.

The descending breath awareness is *Ham*.

Do it . . . *So Ham*.

If your mind is dissipated, know it.

Do not hide the truth.

You are practising awareness of the behaviour of your mind.

Know what you are doing.

No movement, you are like a statue.

So Ham is a powerful mantra which makes the mind quiet very quickly, but it also brings sleep.

Stage 4: Ending the practice

Slowly end the practice.

Stop the mental repetition of *So Ham*.

Slowly withdraw your awareness from the movement of the breath.

Expand your awareness from vishuddhi chakra into the whole body.

Become aware of the whole body in the sitting posture.

Become aware of any sensation in the body, pain, discomfort, tightness or tension, the sensation of feeling cold or hot.

Become aware of your external surrounding, the various sounds, sounds in the room, sounds coming from outside the room.

Remember where you are, situate the body in its environment of the room, the people around you.

Be fully aware of your body and the environment.

Become aware of the natural flow of your breath.

Prepare yourself for *Om* chanting.

Take a deep breath in and chant *Om* three times.

Then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

TRATAKA

The word *trataka* means ‘to gaze steadily’, and the practice of *trataka* develops concentration. In order to concentrate on an object, either internal or external, the mind must be kept under control so that it is not distracted. One way of doing this is by choosing something as the object of concentration which will make the mind experience peace and steadiness. For this purpose, the mantra *Om*, a flower, a picture of your guru, a deity, or the flame of a candle can be chosen. The candle flame is the most convenient and practical object for beginners.

Trataka consists of two stages – *bahir trataka* and *antar trataka*. In *bahir trataka*, or external *trataka*, the concentration is on an outer object because this is easier for the untrained mind, since the mind likes to attach itself to outside objects. In *antar trataka*, or inner visualization, the mind is trained to introvert.

The practice of *trataka* has many beneficial effects. Daily practice helps to develop concentration power and memory. It also helps to strengthen the eye muscles and so improves the eyesight.

Trataka should be practised in the steadiest possible posture. In both external and internal trataka, the eyes should not blink or move in any way. At first this is a little difficult, but with practice it becomes easy. The important thing is relaxation of the eyes. This is essential to obtain a clear inner image. The mind should be kept only on the object or image, nothing else. If the mind starts to think of other things, gently bring it back to the object of concentration.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

TRATAKA ON A CANDLE FLAME

Stage 1: Preparation

Adjust your position so that you are one arm's length away from the candle flame.

Ideally, the flame should be at eye level.

If it is lower, it will create strain when you are practising, if it is too high it will also create strain.

The correct level is exactly at eye level.

Close your eyes and make sure that you are comfortable.

Chant *Om* three times – breathe in *Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . .*

Keep your eyes closed.

Stage 2: Body awareness

Become aware of your body.

Create a mental picture of your body, be aware of your whole body.

Feel that your body is growing from the ground like a tree.

Your whole body is firm like a tree growing from the ground.

Your legs are the roots, and the rest of your body is the trunk.

Feel the firmness of your body.

Your whole body is fixed on the ground, it is part of the ground.

There is no difference between your body and the ground. Your body is growing from the ground.

Try to experience this.

Be aware of your whole body and its firmness on the ground.

Your whole body is fixed firmly on the ground.

Total awareness of your body.

Be aware of your right foot, your left foot. Either you can feel it, or you can create a mental picture of it or both.

Your right knee – total awareness. Your left knee. Your right thigh, your left thigh. Your right buttock, your left buttock. Your whole back – be aware. Your abdomen. Your chest. Your right arm – total awareness. Your left arm. Your head. Your whole body.

Be aware of your whole body – nothing else.

Now open your eyes.

Stage 3: Outer gazing

Look directly into the middle of the flame at the top of the wick.

Try not to blink your eyes. The less you try the easier it is, so don't use too much effort.

Allow your eyes to relax.

Fix your eyes at the top of the wick in the middle of the flame.

Focus your whole attention at the top of the wick.

There is nothing else but the top of the wick.

If you must blink your eyes, then do so – don't strain, but as much as possible look at the top of the wick without flickering or blinking your eyes.

Your whole vision should be focused on the top of the wick. (*Long pause*)

Try to pierce the top of the wick with your vision.

Total concentration. (*Long pause*)

Fix your vision on the top of the wick.

There is nothing else, only the top of the wick.

Your vision is almost pulled to the top of the wick, like a magnet attracts iron filings.

Feel as though your vision, your attention, is being pulled to the top of the wick.

Stage 4: Inner trataka

Now close your eyes.

Watch the after-image of the candle flame if you can see it.

If you can see it, watch it, as a witness.

If you cannot see it, don't worry, merely watch whatever happens in front of your closed eyes.

You must only be a witness; don't involve yourself with what is happening in front of your closed eyes.

See it as happening outside yourself, as something separate from yourself. Be aware. (*Long pause*)

Whatever happens in front of your closed eyes, let it happen. Don't suppress it. (*Long pause*)

Stage 5: Repetition of stages 3 and 4

Now open your eyes and look into the candle flame.

Again concentrate on the top of the wick, in the middle of the flame.

Allow your eyes to relax, but try not to blink or flicker your eyes.

Try to fix, to rivet your attention on the top of the wick in the middle of the flame.

Feel the magnetic attraction of the top of the wick. (*Long pause*)

Be totally absorbed in watching the wick in the centre of the flame. There is nothing else but the top of the wick.

Try to pierce the top of the wick with your vision.

Now close your eyes.

Again, watch the after-image if you can see it.

If you can't see it, then watch the space in front of your closed eyes.

Watch anything that might occur there.

You must be a witness, an observer.

Don't become emotionally involved in what happens there.

Only watch, nothing more. (*Long pause*)

If you can still see a clear image of the candle, then focus your attention on the wick, if you are able to.

If you see visions or pretty pictures, watch them as though you are watching television, but don't interfere with the program.

Only watch. (*Long pause*)

Now open your eyes for the last round.

Again focus your whole attention on the top of the wick.

Look into the centre of the flame, into the middle of the flame, into the very core of the flame.

Try not to blink or to flicker your eyes.

The less you try, the easier it becomes.

When you try too hard, it is difficult.

When you relax more, and do not try so hard, it becomes easier. So try, but not too hard.

Focus your attention on the top of the wick, on nothing else. (*Long pause*)

Look into the heart of the flame, at the wick.

Now close your eyes.

The procedure is the same.

Watch the after-image of the candle if you can see it.

Otherwise watch the black space, and see what happens.

Whatever happens, be a witness, nothing more.

Don't interfere, only observe. (*Long pause*)

Stage 6: Ending the practice

Now chant *Om* five times. Feel the vibrations of *Om* throughout your whole body, your whole brain, the whole room, everywhere. Feel that you are a transmitting station of *Om*, and also feel that you are a receiving station.

Feel the vibrations of *Om* pulsating, vibrating, reverberating, everywhere.

Breathe in, *Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . . Ommm . . .*

Keep your eyes closed for one minute and be aware of your feelings, of your state of mind, of the sounds outside, but sit quietly for one minute. (*Pause*)

Hari Om Tat Sat

Kriya Yoga

The function of kriya yoga is not to make a better personality or a better yogi. Rather, it is to give access to the layers of consciousness which have not yet been tapped, or experienced. That is the psychic dimension of the human being.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Visualization

You can use the same visualizations and images as you use during yoga nidra. Whenever you have a quiet moment, connect to these images of inspiration that give you strength and help you face any discomfort or worry.

Yantra and chakra visualization: Choose any yantra or chakra you wish to connect with. Remember that they are not representations of gods and goddesses but they symbolize certain qualities you may wish to have or develop. They also relate to the physical organs in the body; you can come in contact and in tune with your body through the chakra visualization.

You may want to focus on mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras in view of the forthcoming birth to derive comfort and strength. Manipura chakra is the generating station of energy, and at times of fatigue you can recharge yourself by connecting to this chakra. Anahata chakra is the centre of the

physical heart and the heart of emotions. Focusing on this chakra can help you develop the soft, positive feelings and sentiments you wish to strengthen.

Ganesha is the remover of obstacles and the remover of the fear one faces when confronted with difficulties. Visualizing the Ganesha yantra may help to overcome fear and hurdles. Shakti and her many manifestations may reinforce in you the energy and qualities of motherhood.

These are just a few examples how visualization can be used to support the effort to remain positive and happy throughout your pregnancy.

Some examples of yantras and chakras:

- Anahata chakra
- Swadhisthana chakra
- Shakti yantra
- Ganesha



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Karma Yoga Qualities

In karma yoga we try to awaken the strength of our mind so that we can handle different situations with joy and happiness, not with frustration and anxiety.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

There are certain attitudes and disciplines of karma yoga which can be practised by anyone. The practice of them will enhance the understanding of your dharma in life, and the quality of your actions and interactions. It will bring acceptance, harmony and peace to the sincere karma yogi.

Here are some examples of how the practice of karma yoga can help the expectant mother find balance and joy during her pregnancy.

Attachment – Non-attachment

At this time of great change, it is important to discriminate between what can be maintained and what needs to go and give way to something new. This refers to daily routine and habits, to personal likes and dislikes, to ideas and opinions. If living for the wellbeing of your child is the indisputable priority, then you truly have to adapt, adjust, accommodate – and let go of anything that might compromise this aim.

No doubt, knowing that it is for the good of your child will help in the decision-making. The yogic lifestyle can also

serve as a guide to help and let go of habits that are not in tune with a more sattwic and balanced life.

Effort – Acceptance

Another discipline is finding the balance between your own effort and the acceptance of circumstances that are beyond your control. You may find that life is not as perfect as you would like it to be, yet you can still continue to make the effort and strive for your ideal.

You may not have the understanding you would like to have, yet continue to connect with those people who do support you wholeheartedly. You may live in a big city and the contact with nature may be limited to a small park, still you may spend a weekend out of the city, connect to the sky, the clouds, the rain, the stars, the sun and moon, and you can always dive deep into the images of visualization.

Even after all the preparations you have made with the yoga chakra, a yogic lifestyle and by maintaining a positive attitude, there might be discomforts and difficulties during pregnancy and at the time of birth. Accept and know that your efforts have not been in vain, for the child has imbibed all the qualities you have cultivated.

Self-centred – Selfless

Pregnancy is the training period for a selfless attitude, for once a mother your child will be your main concern. Your care and affection are going to this unknown being who will be a part of your life. Whatever you do is for the wellbeing of this child: ‘child first’ will be your motto for a long time to come. It is a beautiful opportunity to learn, develop and experience a selfless attitude. By putting the ‘I, me, mine’ away you will find lightness and joy in life which no selfish action can give you. Step by step cultivate this ‘selfless you’ and express it to whoever you come across on your journey.

Bhakti Yoga Qualities

Bhakti yoga means to improve the quality of life, the behaviour and thinking patterns, to enhance the sattwic and creative abilities. Therefore, bhakti yoga is the yoga of inner transformation.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The disciplines and attitudes of bhakti yoga are manifold. The aim is a continuous connection to what is positive, constructive and uplifting in life – the Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. The process of sustaining the effort is bhakti yoga, living the connection is bhakti.

Developing positive qualities

There is no shortage of positive qualities, qualities which make us and others feel good. Individual preference and need for a specific quality vary from person to person. You may identify some such as kindness, friendliness, tolerance, then develop and cultivate one quality each month. You can monitor your understanding and progress in the spiritual diary. Here are some examples:

- *Patience* – At a time of change, patience is an important quality to have.
- *Forgiveness* – The mother may want to turn a page in her life and clean the slate of old and pending anger and

frustration and learn to forgive. It will free her child from the burden of resentment which her mother still carries with her.

Swami Sivananda's Song of 18 ITIES

Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity.

Satsang

This is an important practice of bhakti yoga – the choice of good company. People who inspire and encourage us to walk the path of righteousness are valuable company. It might be difficult at times to have the strength to be true to our beliefs and convictions. A yogic lifestyle is – not yet – a commonly accepted way of life, therefore, to be with like-minded people who share your aspirations is helpful. Reading of the lives of saints and their teachings can also guide and reassure you.

Kirtan

According to Swami Sivananda, kirtan is the easiest, cheapest and safest method to attain the state of bhakti. No instructions are required, just sing kirtan from the bottom of your heart – when you are alone, with other family members or friends. Know that your child in the womb is dancing to the tune. It is a most beautiful seed you can plant in his being.

Prayer

The purpose of prayer is to find the source of strength within, to reconnect with the concept of a higher force guiding one's life.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Let your heart speak without fear and express your deepest desires and worries. Whoever you address will listen, comfort and guide you. There are no rules and regulations, for prayer is the language of the heart. It is your most personal and private connection.

Surrender

Surrender means ‘to offer your best’, and anyone can make the effort to do that. The ultimate teaching and aim of bhakti yoga is to live in tune with the higher will or force, with the Divine. *Let Thy will be done* should be ever present in your mind and life. Whatever pregnancy has in store for you, simply accept with the *Let Thy will be done*. It will free you from unnecessary insecurity and anxiety. Understanding and living the beauty of *Let Thy will be done* will give you peace and the assurance that all is well and as it should be. There can be no better way to live your pregnancy.

Sadbhavana (goodwill) meditation

This meditation can be practised at the end of the spiritual practice session, at the end of the meditation practice, at the end of the day, whenever emotionally disturbed or whenever the urge is felt.

TECHNIQUE

Sit comfortably in a meditative asana of your choice with the spine straight, but without any tension. Place your hands on the knees or in the lap in a mudra of your choice. Close your eyes gently. Allow your consciousness to move from one part of your body to another briskly, in a sequence, starting from the toes and going all the way up to the head, making any adjustments necessary for total comfort and relaxation. *Pause*.

Your body is now comfortable, firm and motionless. Take your awareness to your natural breath. Closely watch each ingoing and outgoing breath. *Pause*.

Your breath is slowly becoming slower and more subtle.
Pause.

Let your awareness flow into your chest, riding on the inhalation. Allow your awareness to settle on the innermost point that your breath is touching. *Pause.*

Feel peaceful and calm. Allow the sensation of peace to flood the whole of the heart space. See it in the form of a calm, deep ocean. *Pause.*

Feel at ease, at harmony, within. *Pause.*

Feel joy and happiness. *Pause.*

Experience these feelings in the form of the gentle waves of the ocean and see yourself swimming in this ocean.
Pause.

Chant the *Shanti* mantras mentally, slowly, with understanding.

Asato maa sadgamaya. *Pause.*

Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya. *Pause.*

Mrityor maamritam gamaya. *Pause.*

Visualize many other people swimming in the ocean of your heart space, *hridayakasha*. They are people whom you know and can identify, or whom you do not know; people whom you like or dislike, young and old, men and women. *Pause.*

Send them your heartfelt good wishes by continuing the mantras as before.

Sarveshaam svastirbhavatu. *Pause.*

Sarveshaam shantirbhavatu. *Pause.*

Sarveshaam poornam bhavatu. *Pause.*

Sarveshaam mangalam bhavatu. *Pause.*

Lokaah samastaah sukhino bhavantu. *Pause.*

Pray for the wellbeing of the whole universe, all living beings and non-living things.

*Om tryambakam yajaamahe, sugandhim pushtivardhanam,
urvaarukamiva bandhanaat, mrityormuksheeya mamritaat.*

Om shaantih shaantih shaantih. *Pause.*

Visualize your ishta deva in *hridayakasha*. *Pause.* Bowing to him, continue the chant.

Sit quietly for some time. *Pause.*

Let the image of your ishta deva dissolve. *Pause.*

Become aware of your body, the whole body in the meditative posture. Become aware of your natural breath.

Pause.

Gradually externalize your mind by observing the state of mind, the various sensations generated within and on the surface of your body. *Pause.*

Allow the awareness to expand by observing the external atmosphere, its sounds, smell, touch and light sensations.

Pause.

When you are ready, start moving the body, rub your palms together and place the warm palms over the closed eyes. Gently open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Translation of the *Shanti* mantras:

Develop my consciousness from unmanifest to manifest.

Lead me onto that state of mind where I can experience the reality and not the appearance.

Give me the experience where I can see the inner being who is neither born nor does he die; who existed before I was born; who will be existing even after my death.

Let there be wellbeing everywhere.

Let there be peace everywhere.

Let there be wholeness, completeness everywhere.

Let there be auspiciousness everywhere.

Let there be peace in the whole world.



Appendix 6

Jnana Yoga

The cultivation of the strength of wisdom is the purpose of jnana yoga.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

REVIEW OF THE DAY

Every night before going to sleep, the day should be analyzed, from the time of waking until the present moment. What did one do? How did one interact with people, circumstances and situations? When was there a feeling of anger? When did one feel confused or depressed? Each moment, each hour of the day is observed. If there has been some problem in communication or interaction with someone, the following question should be asked, ‘If I encounter the same situation again, is there a better way to deal with it?’

In this way, responses and reactions are being observed on a day-to-day basis. It only takes five minutes at night. In the course of time, the practitioner will find that he is better able to control his reactive behaviour. Analyzing the events of the day must be done when one is about to go to sleep, to clear the mind of all the clutter that has accumulated during the day.

The day may be divided into different sections of time: morning, afternoon and evening; or in smaller time periods,

like before breakfast, between breakfast and lunch, from lunch to dinner, after dinner. According to one's lifestyle, one may want to look at the day in regard to places: home, work and travel. The more detailed the review, the more defined the image; however, a balance has to be found between precision and becoming lost in or obsessed with a particular situation. The whole day should be reviewed, for only then can certain situations be singled out for analysis.

To make the practice of self-observation more useful and beneficial, the next step is to write down the findings of the review in a spiritual diary.

When you practise the Review of the Day, in the course of time, you will notice that as your awareness continues to grow, it will make you more alert to the conditions and situations being projected at you either by nature or by other people. Then you will be able to perceive what kind of environment you create within yourself, and how it could be changed so that you and others are benefited positively by it.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

SPIRITUAL DIARY

Swami Sivananda emphasized the importance of keeping a spiritual diary. It is meant to be a checklist of spiritual progress, not a recipient for one's emotions. A spiritual diary is a matter-of-fact record, a practical tool for chronicling your behaviour, attitudes and interactions in daily life.

The following three questions relate to the development of a yoga lifestyle. Maybe you want to start with only one question and become regular in your practice, before dealing with all three.

After a few weeks of practice it is good to look at the spiritual diary and define areas of change, improvement or stagnation. Then the practice continues with renewed effort

and the will to do justice to your commitment of respecting yourself and your natural and social environment.

For adolescents

Day	How happy and positive was I today? Rate from 1 to 10.	Was I aware of my social environment and its influence on me?	Did I balance my studies with physical, creative activities, and some quiet time?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

For expectant mothers

Day	How happy and positive was I today? Rate from 1 to 10.	How often and how did I connect with my child?	Did I make an effort to balance external involvement and my connection to the inner self?
1			
2			
3			

4			
5			
6			
7			

SWAN PRINCIPLE

This is a fascinating technique because we become aware of the various traits of human personality. It is called SWAN, not ‘swan’ meaning the bird, it is an acronym. S stands for strength of mind, W for weakness of mind, A for ambitions in life, and N for needs in life. We all have certain strengths, in some they are more active, and in others they are less active. We all have weaknesses, such as lack of self-confidence, fear, inferiority complex, and any kind of emotional or even deep psychic imbalance. We also have certain ambitions of which some are tamasic and some are rajasic. Recognizing this and letting go of these blockages is the culmination point of pratyahara.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Once a week, when you are free, take four sheets of paper and sit down in a quiet place. On one sheet of paper write down what you perceive to be your strengths and positive qualities. On another sheet write down what you perceive to be your limitations and weaknesses. On the third sheet write down what you perceive to be your aspirations, ambitions and expectations. On the fourth sheet of paper write down what your needs are, your real needs, actual needs, not supposed needs, but the actual needs to survive, to live, to be happy.

Develop this list. It won’t happen in one day; it may take many months to make your own list, as one week you would

write it out, then look over it and analyze, “No, this is not correct. I should cross this from here, I should add something here.” Analyze it. It will take time: one month, two months, three months. Then you will be able to discover the traits of your personality and nature. You will be able to discover what your weaknesses and limitations are. You will be able to discover what your strengths are. When you encounter such situations in life where you have to confront your weaknesses and limitations, you will be in a better position to deal with that situation by cultivating the opposite quality, the strength that is the opposite of the weakness.

After you have made the list, pick one item, a sense of inferiority, for example, and work with that item for one week. Pick one weakness and one strength. Observe when that weakness affects you and observe in which moments you can cultivate your strength even more. Work with each trait individually, and if within one year you can work with one quality per month, in twelve months you will have overcome twelve limiting conditions and acquired twelve positive strengths. Work with one item first and learn to manage that. The SWAN analysis must be done once every week and this will allow you to know yourself.

After some time, you may want to do the practice on a daily base, and analyze yourself in regard to the interactions and situations you encountered during the day. Ask yourself: Which situation did I manage well, in the best possible manner, and what was the strength that made me act like that? Which situation did I not manage too well, not in the best possible way, what was my limitation, my weakness, my blockage that prevented me from acting in the appropriate manner? When did an ambition prompt me to act and what was the ambition or aspiration? What need manifested during the day, in which situation and how? What was the need, was it a real one or an imaginary one?

Ask yourself these questions and find answers, write it down in a SWAN diary every day and then look at it after a week or a month. Discover patterns in your behaviour,

patterns of interacting, and decide if you want to continue like that or if you would like to change. Decide how you want to go about it? Which strength do you want to use to overcome a weakness, which ambitions are unnecessary, irrelevant and actually hampering your growth? In which area of your life can you reduce needs? Discover yourself and improve the quality of your being, performance and life.

PRATIPAKSHA BHAVANA

The method of substituting an opposite thought or counter-thought, *pratipaksha bhavana*, enables one to lead a happy, harmonious life of peace and power. A thought of love will at once neutralize a thought of hatred. A thought of courage will immediately serve as a powerful antidote against a thought of fear. Ideas create the world.

When there is irritability, meditate on the virtues of tolerance and self-restraint. If depressed, fill the mind with the idea of joy and exhilaration. When sick, fill the mind with ideas of health, strength and vitality. Worldly thoughts, thoughts of enmity, hatred, revenge and anger will all die. Do not cause pain or suffering to any living being due to greed, selfishness, irritability or annoyance. This is a great sadhana.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Pairs of opposites

Revengefulness	Forgiveness
Anger, irritability	Patience, Forgiveness, Love
Fear	Courage, Love, Humour
Worry, pessimism	Optimism, Faith
Resistance	Surrender, Acceptance

Lack of confidence	Self-esteem, Unconditional positive regard for oneself
Indifference, hatred, disgust	Love, Humour, Non-expectation, Acceptance, Contentment
Sadness	Joy, Activity, Humour, Love
Boredom	Wonder, Curiosity
Nervousness	Calmness, Faith

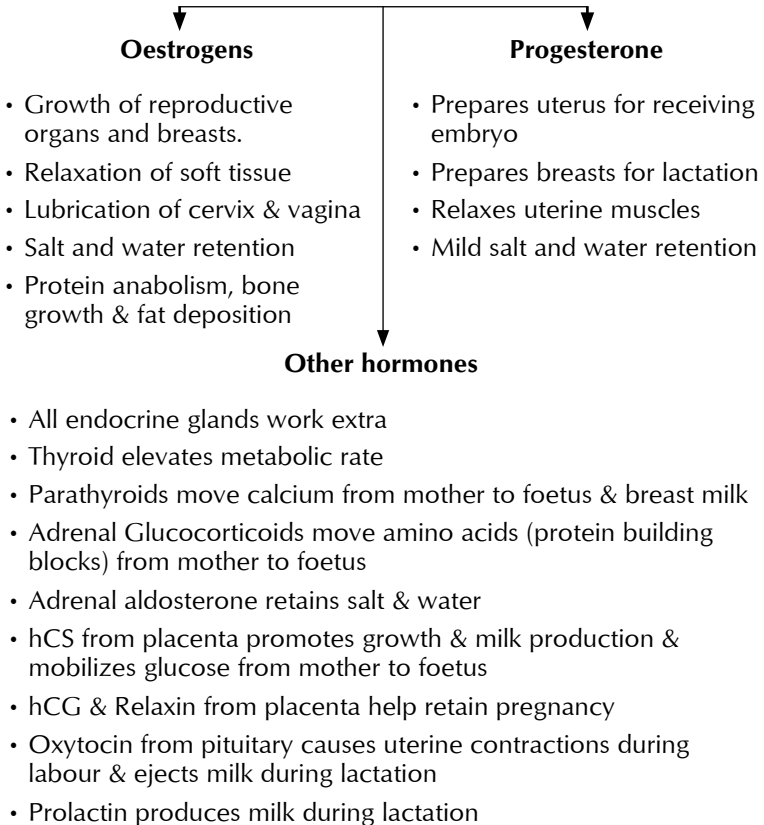
According to yoga, cultivation of an opposite thought, *pratipaksha bhavana*, is important to restrain the senses. If the eyes are attracted to something, create a thought and say to yourself, “This is nice, but the opposite is also nice.” If the eyes are craving beauty, the mind should also accept the ugly. In this way, the sensory attractions have to be balanced by cultivating the awareness of the opposite and not just identifying with that which is pleasurable and offers fleeting joy. The ability to realize both the good and the bad must be developed because they are two sides of the same coin.

You don’t have to interact with the person you consider your enemy, but in your mind, in your sentiments and understanding, that person can cease to be an enemy and just be an ordinary person.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Physiology

Role of Different Hormones during Pregnancy



Physiological changes in a woman's body during pregnancy

A woman's body undergoes many changes in varying degrees during pregnancy in order to fulfil the additional task of sheltering and nourishing the baby. It may affect the mother pleasantly or unpleasantly. Sometimes these natural changes go over-bound and produce adverse effect on the mother. Understanding these changes helps one to accept, manage or overcome them. They are enumerated below.

1. Under the anabolic effect of various hormones, especially oestrogen, breasts and all the organs of the reproductive system enlarge in size to accommodate the growing foetus, to prepare the birth canal for the easy passage of the foetus and for lactation.
2. This anabolic influence spreads to other tissues in varying degree resulting in weight gain.
3. Increased activity of thyroid causes increase in basal metabolic rate (BMR). This can be responsible for feeling hot, increased pulse rate, restlessness, irritability and increased appetite.
4. Increased body mass and BMR lead to increased oxygen consumption. Growth in the size of baby and uterus does not allow the diaphragm to move freely and so the respiration becomes shallow. These two together induce increase in respiratory rate and feeling of shortness of breath.
5. Salt and water retention occur due to the effects of aldosterone, oestrogen and progesterone. This results in generalized swelling of body, weight gain, rise in blood pressure, headache, irritability, feeling dull and lethargic, dilution, anaemia and shortness of breath due to anaemia and water logging of lungs.
6. Nutritional deficiencies are common during pregnancy because of preferential diversion of nutrients to the foetus at the cost of mother, physiologic dilution of blood due to water retention and inadequate intake in light of increased demand. At times tendency towards nausea and vomiting may prevent adequate intake of nutrients.

Nutrients that are commonly deficient are protein, iron, calcium, phosphorus, vitamin D and trace elements.

7. Calcium gets absorbed from the mother's bones during pregnancy and in much bigger magnitude during lactation. This can actually induce softening of bones leading to osteomalacia or osteoporosis. It may be responsible for aches and pains in the body, both in the back as well as limbs. The risk of osteoporosis increases if a woman is repeatedly pregnant too quickly and is breastfeeding her children. Calcium imbalance can cause muscle cramps.
8. Under the effect of oestrogen and progesterone muscles and ligaments relax and at times unduly so. This permits over-stretching of ligaments and joints leading to pain or injury within or around the joint. Minor misalignments can cause painful muscle cramps.
9. Due to the weight of the foetus and uterus in the abdomen, the mother's posture gets disturbed. In order to maintain the centre of gravity, the lower back is pushed forward too much, a condition called lumbar lordosis, over-stretching the inter-vertebral joints. This added by low calcium content of bones causes backache. In some women the enlarged uterus presses on nerves coming out from the vertebral column leading to sciatica-like pain in the back and legs.
10. In the earlier months of pregnancy nausea and vomiting may bother the expectant mother.
11. The smooth muscles of the digestive system are responsible for peristaltic movement propelling the contents downwards. The three sphincters, between stomach and intestine, intestine and colon and at the terminal end of the rectum, are the gates that regulate this movement to some extent. During pregnancy the peristaltic movement tends to get little sluggish due to muscle relaxing effects of hormones. As a result food tends to stay longer in the stomach or colon. The former leads to extra fermentation of food in the stomach,

indigestion, gas and acidity. The later compounded by external pressure of the uterus on the colon leads to constipation.

12. In later months of pregnancy the growing uterus pushes the stomach upward allowing its content to regurgitate into the oesophagus. This combined with increased acid secretion causes heartburn.
13. Pregnant women may experience dizziness due to sudden change in blood pressure that may be transitory or longer lasting. The enlarged uterus or foetal movements may compress a neighbouring organ stimulating parasympathetic nervous system and causing sudden transitory drop in blood pressure. In a recumbent posture like shavasana, the enlarged uterus presses on the inferior vena cava, the biggest vein carrying impure blood from the entire lower half of the body, jeopardizing venous return to heart. This results in a drop in blood pressure that may continue till the venous flow is established again by either change of posture or by pushing the uterus to the left side.
14. The urinary bladder and urethra get stretched and/or compressed due to the enlarging uterus. The bladder may not empty fully leading to urinary stasis, frequent urination and urinary infection.
15. Pregnant women are prone to develop varicose veins in the legs and piles or varicosity of veins in rectum. The veins get dilated under hormonal effect. The enlarged uterus and the foetus compress the veins of the pelvic area and lower limbs resulting in stasis of blood and varicosity of veins.

Psychological changes during pregnancy

Mood changes are frequently observed in pregnant ladies. The hormonal changes can be one of the reasons or can be a contributory factor. Generally she is irritable in the first couple of months but later enters a happy, contented and joyful mood. In the last couple of months, she may

exhibit anxiety and fear about the process of birth and the development and health of the baby. Many women tend to be emotionally very sensitive during this period. Latent depression, anxiety and even psychosis and neurosis of any type has a higher risk of manifesting during pregnancy or immediately after the birth of the baby. The sudden surge in prolactin and oxytocin hormones just after the birth of the baby make the female of any species very attentive and caring of the baby.

Spiritual potentiality

This is a period in a woman's life when her prana is at a very high level. Her psychic ability rises enabling her to get in touch with the unconscious mind more easily through dreams and intuitions. Her heart is open, that is, she is easily able to connect to other people and is less self-centred. She is also able to connect with her inner self and through it, with the cosmic self with lesser effort. She can tap this opportunity for the spiritual growth to her advantage.

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SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

Yoga and Pregnancy places the unique experience of pregnancy within the total experience of human life and the vast reality of creation. Nine months may seem brief in a woman's life, short but forever life changing.

Living a yoga lifestyle and imbibing yoga samskaras through the various branches of yoga as developed by the Satyananda Yoga—Bihar Yoga tradition enhances the quality of mother and child, the family society, and ultimately the quality of humankind.

This is not a self-help book for expectant mothers, nor a medical guide. The aim is to suggest attitudes, disciplines and practices of yoga so that the new life can begin in the most beneficial manner.

The child's education begins in the mother's womb. Whatever habits of thought, action and feeling are formed in a child's early days last throughout life.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati



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